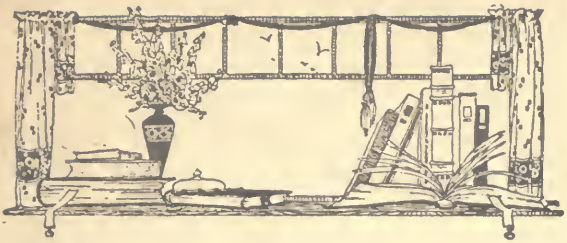
TREACHEROUS GROUND

JOHAN BOJER



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Johan Bojer

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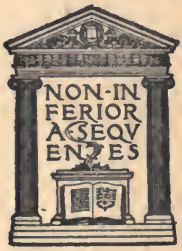
BY

JOHAN BOJER

AUTHOR OF "THE GREAT HUNGER," "THE FACE OF THE WORLD," "THE POWER OF A LIE," ETC.

TRANSLATED FROM THE NORWEGIAN BY

JESSIE MUIR



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BOOK I

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Chapter I

KRISTIANIA, as usual, had been unfortunate in its 17th-of-May weather.[1] But in spite of the wind and the showers of hail that every now and then whirled over the house-tops, the streets were full of merry people, and high and low flags flapped in the wind, even on the roofs of the trams that moved cautiously along with ceaseless ringing of bells. Later in the afternoon there was the demonstration, which ended in a square, round a platform with speakers, where the demonstrators waved their hats and shouted hurrah. The streets were thronged, and resounded with laughter, cries of all kinds, and sounds of merriment, so that the birds of passage flying northwards far above would think that down at the head of the fjord lay a town that sang.

While this was going on, a solitary man was standing in an entry just opposite the female prison, apparently taking no interest in all that was going on. The collar of his grey

[1] The 17th of May is the Norwegian national festival.

ulster was turned up about his ears, and his felt hat drawn down over his eyes, as though he were trying to escape notice. People passing in and out of the entry thought he must be ill or drunk; but he, lost in thought, stood staring up at the dreary prison, as if he expected to see a face that he knew at one of the barred windows.

He had stood thus for a long time, when suddenly he seemed to come to a determination. He walked across the street to the door of the prison, and raised his hand as if to ring the bell; but suddenly his hand dropped to his side, and he retreated a few steps, passed his hand across his forehead, and moved away aimlessly, keeping close to the wall, as if he were running away.

An hour later he was standing ringing at the door on the first floor of a house down by the fortress.

"Is the pastor at home?"

"Yes; please come in!"

But, although the maid had opened the door wide, it was a moment or so before the stranger could make up his mind to enter; and even when he had done so, and had hung up his ulster and hat in the hall, he seemed inclined to put them on again and go.

Meanwhile the popular priest was walking slowly up and down the dining-room floor, flourishing a piece of paper that he held in his hand. He was in evening dress, and was going out to dinner, where he had promised to make a speech. Even a zealous pastor, after having preached in church, visited the poor and sick, stood by a death-bed, and elsewhere listened to all kinds of complaints and confessions, may feel an uncontrollable desire to refresh himself with something brighter; and therefore to-day the priest had determined to make a lively speech. His steps creaked cheerfully up and down, and gradually he seemed to see distinctly the guests, the table and the flowers, and to feel the champagne glass in his hand. "And we priests," he heard himself say—"well, we might be gallants too, might we not, ladies?" and he could see the faces round the table begin to brighten. That was a good thing to say. The creaking steps were suddenly silent, while he made a note of it on the paper he held, and involuntarily his grey-bearded face put on a smile such as he intended it should wear during the speech.

"What?" he said, turning with a jerk when the maid appeared, looking as if she

wanted something. "Does somebody else want to speak to me? Who is it? Oh! But I suppose you can tell me whether it's the Emperor of Russia or an assassin!" He was really cross at being disturbed just now. He looked at his paper, but felt that he could not get on with his speech until he had seen the stranger: so with a sigh he put the piece of paper in his pocket, and passed through the drawing-room to his study.

When the stranger seated there heard the creaking footsteps approaching, he looked about him as if he would have liked to fly. "What am I doing!" he thought. "At the priest's—I ! Am I really going out of my mind?"

The next moment the door opened, and the priest's white shirt-front appeared. An order hung against his black coat. He stopped for an instant, and looked over his spectacles at the stranger ; but, as he did not know him, he went a step or two nearer, put his hands behind him, and threw back his head.

"Good-evening," he said at last. "What can I—— Ah!" and he smiled a strange smile. "No, really—is it you?"

Without giving his hand to the stranger, he went and seated himself in the arm-chair be-

side his writing-table, leaned back, and with a wave of his hand bid his visitor be seated. His face clearly showed how astonished he was.

"Oh, so you know me again!" said the young man at last, passing his hand in an embarrassed way across and across his forehead.

"Yes; aren't you Herr Erik Evje? Yes, of course. You must excuse my not recognising you at once."

"It's more than a year since we met at the Students' Club."

"Yes; I remember."

"I offended you then, Herr Pastor."

"Not me, but all of my cloth," interrupted the priest, with an indulgent smile. "If I remember rightly, you blamed us priests for pretty well all the misery to be found in the world, ha ha!"

"Yes; I'm sorry to say I've talked a lot of nonsense in my time," said the young man in a subdued tone. "But now I come to you, Herr Pastor, just because—because I've written and said so much against you."

The priest looked attentively at the other man, who was still standing and looking quite helpless. This was indeed an unexpected visit.

This daring writer in the *Social Democrat,* this maker of inflammatory speeches at all strikes and labour demonstrations, this priest-hater and atheist, suddenly standing here and looking so humble. The priest involuntarily bent forward to look at him more closely. Now he goes at last and sits down on the other side of the writing-table. Now he coughs. And when any one is so pale, and keeps wiping his forehead to remove perspiration that is not there at all, and looks so timid—hm, hm! If he had come to humble himself, it would make a sensation.

"You're surprised at my coming down upon you like this, Herr Pastor, but all the merry people in the streets were making such a noise. I'm out of it all; and I happened to pass here, and so I rang the bell."

"Aren't you chairman of a workmen's club, Herr Evje?"

The man he addressed started. "No, no, thank goodness that's over! Latterly I've been wandering about homeless."

"Homeless?"

"Yes—oh, you're looking at my clothes. No, not in that way. Unfortunately I still live comfortably upon the money that father scraped together—in his way."

"Wasn't your father a factory owner in the north?"

The young man smiled a melancholy smile.

"Oh, his unvarnished title was distiller and forest-destroyer. I feel to-day as if I must tell the truth, even about my father. He turned the peasants' corn and potatoes into spirits, and then, when they were drunk, he bought their farms from them in order to plunder the forest. He has made whole districts poor, even in firewood! and the well-to-do people he has brought to beggary are almost too numerous to be counted. But he became rich, and gained orders and honour; and when he died, how the priest did praise him in his funeral address! But I—well, it all went down the wrong way with me, and then I became a socialist."

"He's just what he used to be!" thought the priest, and he pressed his lips together as he made a movement as if to rise. "Well, Herr Evje!" he said aloud, "what may I——"

Erik Evje sat thoughtfully running his fingers through his beard. "Well, it was this, Herr Pastor," he said in a thoughtful tone. "It was——"

The priest waited impatiently for the con-

tinuation. He could hear his wife moving about in the drawing-room: it was really time they started for the dinner. And before he was aware of it, his thoughts were in the middle of the speech he had just left, and once more he felt the champagne glass in his hand, and saw the table and the guests.

"It was this," the voice on the other side of the table at last went on: "Is there really a God?"

The priest started at the word God, rose abruptly, and took a turn up and down the room to collect his thoughts; for at that very moment he had been smiling in his thoughts and saying: "And we priests, we might be gallants too, might we not, ladies?" Now he began to walk slowly up and down with closed eyes, as if trying to put aside this frivolous speech to catch sight of God.

"Tell me!" he said at last, stopping in front of the other man. "Will my answer have any real significance for you?"

The other smiled and shook his head. "Well, no, to tell the truth; but still—if you could only get me to believe in something or other again. Blessed is he that believes, for he can sin."

"What?" exclaimed the priest, staring at him through his spectacles.

"And blessed is the rich man, for he may run into debt. Blessed is he who has many friends, for what does it matter if he makes enemies. But he who does not believe, and yet has sinned! Faith, you see, is a mountain to stand upon, from which our sins look like trifles down there in the valley. But woe betide him who slips down! He becomes so small himself that the sins get beyond his control. That's why we human beings need some sort of God."

He glanced at the priest, who was standing before him with his hands under his coat-tails.

"But," he went on, smiling, "now I've got to my real business, Herr Pastor. What's the meaning of conscience? Can one really depend upon its being a reliable measurer of good and evil? Isn't it rather a disease? Because, do you see, if conscience is a divinity in man, it's a cowardly divinity at any rate. It only attacks us when it sees we are defenceless. If some day you lose everything, and are left lying by the roadside like any animal, you may depend upon it conscience will dig her claws into you. She circles above us, like vultures above an army, waiting for a horse to

be unable to go on any longer. Then they come! Conscience is like that. That is not a chivalrous God, Herr Pastor."

At that moment the door into the drawing-room opened a crack, and a voice whispered: "I'm ready."

"I'm coming," answered the priest, and he took a step or two towards the drawing-room, but only to return. "Well, well, Herr Evje," he said in farewell, "since we differ so much about the starting-point—namely, God, we two cannot have much to say to one another."

Erik Evje smiled. He was far too much occupied with what he had upon his mind to notice the priest's desire for him to go.

"One sins only against one's self and one's fellow-creatures, Herr Pastor; but as long as one believes in something great—vaguely—one can crush any number of human destinies, and conscience only sends the account in to this vague something. But it's another matter altogether when one's stock of ideals is exhausted. That's why I've come to you, Herr Pastor. You're a man whose conscience is as a healthy, happy man's should be; and now you must tell me whether I'm really guilty."

"Guilty?" repeated the priest mechanically. He was going up and down with small

steps, while his thoughts were at the dinner-table. "And we priests—might be gallants too."

Erik Evje looked at him earnestly. "Yes; you know, of course, what I'm accused of?"

The priest passed his hand across his forehead, and tried to wake to the other's world.

"Accused of? No, I really don't!" As he said this, he happened to look at his watch.

"Then you must be the only person who doesn't, Herr Pastor, for the papers have made a good thing out of it, I should think. And suppose he were right, both he and—— There!" He passed his hand across his forehead again, and sighed deeply.

"Of whom are you speaking?"

"Of Mogstad, of course, the felon, my friend—ha ha!—who took the work-people away from me, and had me kicked out. Didn't you read that scandalous story in the papers? He got up at a meeting at the Institute, and pointed at me, and said it was I who had sent him to prison. It was I who had made him a wounded bird. And they believed him, and took his part. At the time I was certain it was a lie, but since"—he passed his hand across his brow, and closed his eyes—"it's dangerous going about quite alone."

The priest again heard his wife's impatient footsteps in the drawing-room, and became more and more desperate. He had never felt another's confidences so exacting. And, while he was making an effort to keep his thoughts upon this man, a recollection crossed his mind.

"The fact of the matter is," continued Evje, "that we were fellow-students, he and I. He was poor, but clever——"

"Evje!" the priest broke in, stopping in the middle of his walk, and putting his hand over his eyes. "Two or three years ago I was chaplain at the female prison here. Wasn't there a young girl there, who——What was her name again?"

What followed was quite unexpected. Evje suddenly rose, stared for a moment at the priest, and then turned to the door and hastened out. The priest was struck dumb with amazement. At last he hurried out into the hall in time to see the other disappearing through the hall door, carrying his hat and coat. "But, Evje!" he cried, "what's the matter? What's the matter? Well I never!" Going to the top of the stairs, he called once more: "Evje!" But then he heard the street door bang.

"Are you ready at last?" said a voice from

the drawing-room. "You don't seem to think how late we shall be!"

A little later, when in the carriage on his way to the dinner, the priest took out his paper again, and tried to pick up the threads of his cheerful speech. "And we priests might be gallants too." But suddenly he made a grimace, and threw the paper out of the window. The other man had really managed to make him low-spirited.

"Was he mad?" he thought. "And what is he doing with himself this evening?"

Chapter II

Most people get their ideals like the wounded animal, which instinctively makes its way to water. It was thus that Erik Evje had studied first theology, then medicine, and last of all had become a labour leader, just as some misfortune in himself required some special alleviation.

During the summer when he came home from his first term as a student, he fell violently in love with a cottager's daughter, who was a servant in his father's house; and when his father understood that it was his intention to marry the girl, there was a great to-do. The end of it was that at last Erik yielded and gave up the girl although she was *enceinte.* But when he went to the capital that autumn to study law, he would often lie all day long on his sofa, sick with memories of home. In this big, strange town, where he had neither a mother nor an intimate friend to whom he

could pour out his heart, he could see no other relief but in God. Finally he determined, and obtained leave, to study for the ministry; and that he now became so zealous in his studies, so strong in faith and so earnest in his prayers, was due to the fact that away in the north there was a pale little face that always had to be kept at a distance.

By degrees his efforts were successful, and when, a couple of years later, he heard that the girl had had a child by a married man, and in her despair had killed it, he was strong enough in his Christian zeal to think: "Was she like that, too?"

One bright day in spring, he met under the trees in the Students' Grove Inga Rud, the daughter of the district doctor at home. That evening his prayers were brighter than usual. It was as if the Supreme Being had been dressed in a pink dress and light straw hat. Soon his fellow-students would look after him in the street, and say: "Why, Erik Evje has actually had his hair cut!" "And been to his tailor!" another would add. When, a few days later, he appeared at band-time in a silk hat, a new light coat and pale yellow gloves, people began to put their heads together and whisper: "Who is she?"

They should only have known what Erik went through during this time. The less encouragement the young woman gave him, the more did he cling to God's aid. At last came the evening when he threw himself upon his bed after receiving a distinct refusal. "Thy will be done!" he groaned into the pillows, but this time it was a prayer through clenched teeth. A few days after, he read the announcement of her engagement with a young officer, and the paper dropped from his hands. He had hoped until now. "Thy will be done — no, no!" And when in the evening he folded his hands as usual, he burst into a peal of cold laughter. The officer would be sure to curse and swear, but he got her. He himself prayed and prayed and chastened himself, but only had the disgrace. New, dangerous thoughts began to fill his mind, and heaven became so exceedingly empty.

Very soon after he was standing one rainy summer day at his father's funeral, listening to the priest's panegyric upon the deceased; but at the moment Erik could see in his mind's eye his father turning the cottager's young daughter out of the house. "Shall I become a hypocrite and a fool like this priest?" he asked himself. "Is it any wonder that di-

vinity students are generally refused when they propose?"

At that time science was called the religion of the young, and when Erik came back to the capital, he kicked his theological text-books into a dark attic, and took up medicine. This caused the first break with his mother, but Erik went at it energetically, like one who has lost his house and will clear the ground for a new one. There was a sense of freedom in venturing to be young again, and enjoying the gay student's life. He had plenty of pocket-money, and he made friends with clever young men and joined a small enthusiastic party of free-thinkers, who swore by the sun and a clear brain.

For two bright, happy years, he himself, his ideas and his work, seemed to be one and the same. When his spirits became boisterous, and he diligently scattered oaths about him, it was because of a desire to kick the old edition of himself, the theologian and under-taker, who now seemed such a pitiable object to him.

It was then that the story about Mogstad came. This young man was Erik's best friend, clever, but morbidly jealous of his honour, perhaps because his mother was a laundress.

One day, a short while before they had to go up for their first examination, he came up to Evje's room, and dropped despondently into a chair. "Well?" asked Erik. "This confounded money!" groaned the other. "My mother can't do any more, and unfortunately I haven't time just now to rinse her clothes for her. There's great danger of my examination coming to nothing this year again, and I suppose I shall have to go into the country and turn tutor!" "How much do you want?" asked Erik. "Oh, three hundred miserable krones." "Dear me, I ought to be able to get you that!" said Erik. "You!" cried Mogstad, springing up and seizing his friend by the collar and shaking him. "Did you say that you —— Eh?" "Yes, but I haven't got it here. I suppose you can wait a few days?" Could he wait a few days! Yes, indeed! And singing and delighted, Mogstad hurried off.

Why did not Evje immediately procure the money? It is true he had not the amount by him; but why did he not write to his mother? He was rather reluctant to do so, because latterly she had complained of his extravagance. Then why did he not pawn his gold watch or his piano? No, he was too much occupied with his coming examination to be quite able to im-

agine his friend's embarrassment. Mogstad came again and again, and Erik always said that he should have the money, but at the same time he put off doing anything to obtain it. At last Mogstad was angry, and asked if he meant to help him or not. Erik was ashamed, but would not explain matters. "As soon as I get any," he said, "you shall have it." "As soon as you get any, yes!" said Mogstad, with a scornful laugh. "But I'd rather it were on this side of the day of judgment!" Erik now grew angry, too, just because he was ashamed of himself. "Confound you, man; perhaps you can get it quicker from some one else!" Mogstad flushed crimson. "Oh, is that what you say? By Jove, you're a scamp!" And he sprang up and was about to go, when Evje cried to him to wait. One word brought another, until Mogstad called Evje a coward, whereupon Evje turned him out of the room.

No one could suspect less than Erik what the consequences of this would be. The following morning a letter arrived, which brought him very quickly out of bed. He turned the paper this way and that, and read it once more. He almost began a dance upon the floor, then stood still and read the letter again with starting eyes. Mogstad wrote from prison.

When Erik had been so long in fulfilling his promise, the poor man had resorted to the expedient of forging a cheque; and when he left Evje in a rage, he had gone straight to the police and given himself up.

When Erik had grasped the full extent of this misfortune, he felt as if he were guilty of manslaughter. He soon saw that his fellow-students knew all about it, and that they would have liked to thrash him. One day, too, he met Mogstad's mother. The old washerwoman looked as if she would like to efface herself, but yet gave him a look that cut him to the heart.

At last he summoned up his courage and went to the prison; but Mogstad refused to see him. As he walked home with bowed head, he would have liked to throw himself into the sea. When he tried to bury himself in his books and forget everything else, he once more found a closed door; for it was as if these studies, which he and Mogstad had worked at together, now asked: "What have you done with him? Can you really go up for this examination while your friend is being sentenced to penal servitude?"

Erik Evje shut himself up, and could not sleep at night. The painful memories of the

cottager's daughter revived again, like a disease that was supposed to have been healed. He brooded over the questions of guilt and responsibility, but he fared like the horse that has got into a bog—the more he struggled the deeper he sank; and, in ever-increasing despair, he strained his eyes in search of some one to help him out again. There was no longer a God for him; his mother did not understand him; his friends had turned their backs upon him. And as the horse at last utters a piercing shriek, so from Erik Evje's pillow would arise, in the silence of the night, a sigh of sorrow and contrition, asking: Is there no power in heaven or on earth that can comfort an unhappy being?

One evening he chanced to drop into a labour meeting, at which a well-known socialist leader was to speak. When he got home that evening, he walked up and down the room for hours, in a strange condition of mind. It seemed as if the speaker had said: "You are innocent. It is poverty." Evje felt it an immense relief, but dared not as yet believe it. "When you come to think of it," he said to himself, "why did my father turn Olina out of the house? Why was she unworthy to love me? Poverty: that is clear enough. But

Mogstad—why was he led to forge a cheque? Would he have done it if he had been rich? No, indeed! Poverty too!" The more he thought it over, the clearer it became, that society was really to blame both for Olina and Mogstad. At last he could breathe freely. At last he felt a crushing burden removed. And since it was no longer his fault, his sympathy could flow freely. "Poor things!" he thought. "How they must have suffered!"

He had to go to several labour meetings, and take part in the discussion; and, hurt as he still was by the remembrance of Mogstad, his words acquired warmth that made a sensation. Before long he had to lay aside his medical text-books to read Karl Marx and Lasalle. Instead of attending lectures, he went to a working-men's association where he was to give a lecture; and when his fellow-students went up for their examination, he was sitting at home writing an article for the *Social Democrat*. Every accusation he could bring against capital he felt as a plaster upon a smarting wound; every kind word he could utter about the poor became a greeting to those he feared he had crushed. He did not even notice himself that more than once in his speeches he had worked up his indignation

against capital by picturing to himself Olina being turned out of the house, and no one could notice in the winged sentences in the *Social Democrat* that his pen had been dipped in Mogstad's forgery and that they were a defence of himself.

To his old set of free-thinkers he wrote, in a farewell letter: "What use have people for truth as long as they have no bread?" And to his mother, who soon began to threaten: "If I have to choose between my monthly allowance from you and my conscience, I choose the latter." The money continued to come, however, but it seemed to burn his fingers. He left his pretty rooms, and moved into an attic, prepared his own breakfast and supper, and gave the surplus towards providing books for the working-men.

The patient becomes fond of the doctor who at last makes him well, and Erik Evje grew fond of his work, because it had healed his diseased conscience. He twice went voluntarily to prison, first for libelling a factory owner, and then for refusing to serve his last year of military service. Each time he came out again, his eyes had acquired a new, peculiar brightness.

But Erik Evje also tasted the sweetness of

serving a great idea—as when the small man in his attic feels his soul expanding to include countries, towns and ages; or when he and the ten thousand become one; or when the thought of dying becomes less terrifying, because the other self, the idea, will live. As a lecturer he knew a happiness that was greater and more abundant than that which comes from applause and flattery. It was in converting his secret pain into a cause that others again adopt as their cause; in taking note of his sorrow or joy, his repentance or hope, taking possession of hundreds and making them one with himself. It was then that he was happy. From this time onwards he began to say "we" instead of "I," because he always felt himself one of a large company. "This is what we're like!" he would say when he was displeased with himself for a moment; and when he went to bed, instead of his evening prayer, it was a comfort to surrender himself to the night with the thought, "I can never again be quite alone."

He heard that Mogstad, on coming out of prison, had emigrated to America, and once more he felt a relief; for although he was sorry for him, he did not want to see him again. A year had passed when one evening Evje was

acting as chairman at a working-men's association meeting, and a bearded man at the other end of the hall rose to oppose him. Evje started at the voice, and suddenly their eyes met. It was Mogstad.

It was a strange moment for Evje. He would have liked to have run away, or to have the other turned out. After the meeting, he saw his former friend standing in the background, smiling uncertainly at him, and Erik felt his throat contract, but went out without speaking to him. At the next meeting Mogstad was present again, and this time Erik did not look at him at all, for he had a feeling as if Mogstad were sitting there with a revolver. Mogstad soon became a zealous member of the association, and in all the discussions he held an opinion opposed to that of the chairman. Whenever their eyes met, it seemed to Evje that Mogstad smiled an evil-omened smile; and soon he felt as if he were being pressed closer and closer against the wall in the sight of every one. At last he could stand it no longer, and burst out: "I wonder whether that gentleman is the right one to find fault with what others do!" Mogstad, feeling many eyes turned upon him, sprang upon a chair, and, addressing the room, said: "Yes, dear

friends, it's true that I've been a convict; but that man was the friend whose fault it was. Don't believe him when he talks beautifully about the poor! I know him. He's a scamp!"

A dead silence followed, and all eyes were turned towards Evje, sitting, pale as death, upon the platform. They were accustomed to see him hold his own, but he was silent still. He felt the room going round. The revolver he had feared had at last been pointed at him and fired.

Before he quite knew what he was doing, he had risen and was making his way towards Mogstad. Men stood upon benches and tables in order to see better. Mogstad was still standing upon his chair, waiting for Evje. He was smiling, but his hands were clenched. In another minute the two men were shaking their fists at one another. "It's a lie!" "No, indeed it isn't!" "Say once more that it was I who—who sent you to prison!" "I say it again!" "Then prove it!" Mogstad laughed scornfully. "No," he said, "I can't prove it; for that matter you can send me there again."

When at last Evje recollected himself and returned to his seat, he felt that his position depended upon what he now did. With a vibrating voice he proposed that Mogstad should

be expelled from the association; and when this proposal was rejected by a good majority, he struck the desk with his chairman's staff, and left the place.

A great many people rang at his door the following day, but it was not opened, and the morning papers lay untouched outside the door. Where was he?

They could not see that a man was sitting at the writing-table, supporting his chin on his hands, and staring straight before him. Every time the bell rang he started, but stayed where he was.

He was worn out with pacing the floor and raging against the work-men's association, which had betrayed him, and against Mogstad, who, it was evident, had not yet tortured him enough. Now at last he had become aware that something much worse had happened to him yesterday—namely, that this attack had not only come from behind, from his own people, but from within himself. And this was just what he had felt was lying in wait for him, from the moment he had seen Mogstad again.

Why was he sitting here and beginning to feel so thoroughly ashamed? He felt as if he had been taken yesterday in the act of com-

mitting forgery, as if Mogstad had uncovered a secret wound of his, for all to see.

He suddenly rose as if to shake the whole thing off, and threw himself upon his bed, but soon started up again, and put on his overcoat. But at the door he stopped; for wherever should he go? Of late years he had had only party friends, and they, now? He took off his coat again. In the letter-box he found a request from his paper that he would give an account of what had happened. Oh, indeed! So the morning papers had made the most of yesterday's scene, and now his enemies would rejoice. Well, he was used to defending himself, but this? He passed his hand over his forehead. To open the old wound, to defend himself against a wounded bird! He opened the door, and, instead of picking up the papers and reading them, he kicked them down the stairs, and then shut himself in again, and sat down gloomily with his elbows on the table.

One hour passed—two. "Nonsense!" he cried suddenly, rising. "Let that rabble choose the convict for their leader if they like. It'll be more suitable."

But when the letter was sent in which he resigned the duties of chairman, he felt like a man who moves his furniture out into the

street, without knowing where he is going to move to. What now?

"Why, the cause and the ideas are the same as before!" he said to himself, to give himself courage; but he soon found it was not so, for when he at length pulled himself together to write an article again, he could not get over the fact that now the labour question for him would only be to see Mogstad again, to be betrayed again, to have a secret wound opened again.

He sighed, and in a little while got up and looked involuntarily at his medical books, standing covered with dust; but soon he shook his head. It was too late for that too. The years had been passing: it was too late.

He sat on, staring straight before him; then, putting his hand to his forehead, he murmured: "No, no; it cannot be true!"

When at last it grew dark, he crept down and brought bread and butter enough for several days. There was something he must come to an understanding about before he went out again.

A new day comes. He is sitting at the table, reading, but thinking of other things altogether. He has his pipe in his mouth, but does not notice that it is out.

To go away—home? And fall in with his mother's wishes by taking over the farm and the works? Oh yes! Become a capitalist and employer of labour—he! Continue his father's work—he! Swallow his delusions, go home like the prodigal son! Oh yes!

But what then? Ah, he was going to read that book. So he lights his pipe again.

This sudden transition from being busy to sitting idle and out of everything! There would soon be an empty space between him and the outside world. He began to see a man upon a shore, letting all his valuables be rowed away. He has no more use for them. They glide farther and farther off, and the man gazes after them as after a lost paradise.

There came long days when Erik Evje sat and let everything go. Making up his mind was like looking into a catastrophe that he would rather close his eyes to as long as possible.

But now, when he no longer had the well-being and the faults of others to meddle with, his thoughts began to revolve about himself. The blind in front of the beautiful landscape of ideas and people out there, which had recently been part of himself, had been suddenly pulled down, and he discovered how shrunken

he was, how exceedingly small he had become, and he involuntarily sought for something different and greater, in which he could forget himself. But what?

Erik found it bad enough to wake to a new day for which he had no use; but it was still worse to put out the light in the evening, and enter upon a new night. Thoughts which in the noise of day he had kept down, in the silence of night raised their heads again; and now he had no defence against them.

He began to wander hand in hand with a young girl one summer night beside a blue fjord. What did he promise then? Where was she now?

He turned over and tried to sleep; but in a little while he was going through the years when he and Mogstad were good friends. And there stands a washerwoman, bent and toil-worn, rubbing her fingers to the bone on people's clothes; and on Saturdays she takes a heavy basket of clean clothes, and goes out to collect her coppers. For she has a son who is to be helped on. At night she bends over the steaming iron, and coughs a little, and grows more and more hollow-cheeked; for her son must have new books, and he must be decently dressed too. Then one day she is unable to do

anything more. "Just you lie still and rest, mother," says the son. "I have a friend who has rich parents."

Erik Evje starts up suddenly and rubs his eyes. "Plague take it! Am I not to get any sleep either now?"

When he has lain for a little while, with his head buried in the pillow, and the quilt rising and falling with his breathing, his thoughts have cunningly found their way into the prison.

When you think of it, a whole day must be intolerably long when you know you are locked in and some one else has the key, and that you will not get out to-morrow, nor the day after to-morrow, nor even in a week's time. A month must be an eternity; and a whole year! Then think of seven years! And that is what she was sentenced to.

The slender little creature must be there still. Has she seen blue sky in all these years, or a blade of grass? Has she perhaps, for seven years, not known whether it were winter or spring?

Is she one of those prisoners who have to clean feathers, sitting day after day inhaling that filth? Her chest! Perhaps she could not stand it, and—— He suddenly writhes in his bed.

It is a relief to turn his thoughts to a meeting to protest against the barbarism of the prisons; but, in the middle of his indignant speech, Mogstad suddenly stands up on a chair and interrupts him. "Do for once," he says, "hold your jaw about the faults of society. You know quite well that it's you yourself who sent her to prison!"

"What? Upon my word, now he's declaring that that's my fault too! Did I ask her to kill that child?" Mogstad answers:

"Think the matter over honestly. Who was the first to lure her on to the downward path? Who led her astray? Who swore and promised marriage? Who deserted her the first time she was with child? Ask her whom she looks upon as her real executioner."

Erik sits up in bed to light the candle, but finds no matches, and has to sink back on to his pillows again. Whichever side he turns to, he sees her more and more distinctly in the prison. Her beautiful fair hair has been cut off, and her face has become thin and grief-worn. But she raises her eyes to his, and says, with a melancholy smile: "All the other prisoners here have visitors, but I know no one in town except you. I knew you were here, and several times during these years I have

thought I heard your voice out in the passage."

"He had a good excuse!" says Mogstad. "He has been so occupied with improving others."

Erik turns over again, making the bed creak. He can draw the clothes up over his head, but he is just as helpless, and all the ravens of the night can gather together if they like to peck at his liver. And up there in the height is nothing but cold, empty space.

The next evening Erik brought a bottle home with him. A glass of whisky and water would make him sleep. A few days later he found it best to put the bottle on the table by his bed.

In the occasional glimpses that his former fellow-students had of Erik Evje, it was difficult to recognise him in the shabby figure which they saw stealing along. No one could make out what he was doing; but there was no mistaking the fact that he had begun to drink. At last every one knew that the former eager combatant had gone to the dogs, and people were too busy to occupy themselves any further with the matter.

On rare occasions he would steal through the streets, attracting as little notice as pos-

sible, to the district female prison, and when he had stood there for some time gazing at the gloomy building, he would go up to the door as if to ring, but at the last moment lacked the courage, and would stagger along the rows of houses as if in flight.

It was thus he had stood on that 17th of May, and thence he had gone to the priest in order to be able for once to speak out. And he confessed, and felt the relief of it, until the priest happened to mention the girl in prison. This was touching a wound that was far too deep to be displayed; and confused as Erik already was, he involuntarily fled down the stairs and quickly away through the streets.

Late that evening he was standing in an out-of-the-way corner of the Students' Grove, watching the noisy crowds that streamed up and down Carl Johan's Street, the confusion of faces, the flirting and screaming, the rough pleasure, the walking up and down. "These people imagine that they are celebrating a general festival," he thought; "while in reality every single one of them is only thinking about himself. That's what we're like." But a fresh burst of laughter from among the crowd seemed to answer: "Perhaps that's what you're like, but we're not."

Towards midnight he was trudging aimlessly along the Ekeberg Road, with his hands buried in his overcoat pockets. When he found himself in the dim wood on the hill, he stopped and looked round in astonishment at finding himself there, and seated himself upon a stone by the wayside. The night had already begun to grow lighter. Down in the valley below lay the noisy town, half hidden in a thin mist. Out among the islands a few pleasure-boats could still be seen upon the blue fjord.

Evje bowed his head upon his hands. "Why am I sitting here, when every one else is down there? Why have I dropped out of everything?" he asked himself.

He thought, as he had so often done lately, of his mother. She was a widow and old, with everything on her hands, while her only son fooled and loitered about here with ideas that only made him unhappy.

In a little while he was fancying himself at home at Evje, up there between the fir-clad hills and the fjord. His mother, in spite of everything, has been expecting him, and she welcomes and makes him comfortable. The servants and farm labourers are the same as before, and how healthily and reasonably they look at everything in this world! The old

foreman, who is respected by the whole countryside, is standing outside the stable door with a short pipe in his mouth, talking about this affair with Mogstad. "A pretty thing," he says, "if every one who couldn't get money lent him were to go and commit a forgery!" And the old man cannot help laughing at such talk. This simple, honest man has also just as straightforward an opinion about the girl in prison. "You must be crazy!" he says. "It would be different if you had been father to the child she killed; but the one she put down to you, you have paid, and paid punctually for, like an honest fellow. If only all fathers were like you!"

And Erik sat there upon the stone and went home in imagination over and over again: and it was a solace to him to make all the home people seem alive, to hear distinctly what the foreman said.

"If I were to go home," he thought, "I should not only meet people who looked up to me as they used to do, but I could also do something for the work-people there. Has not the foreman been engaged for ever so many years, and not been able to make enough to marry upon? There is a great deal of uncultivated land belonging to Evje. Supposing I——"

Erik's gaze was fixed upon the golden night sky far beyond the dark hills in the west; but what he saw there at this moment was the first dawn of a new idea, and he felt like a shipwrecked man when he at last thinks he can see a boat.

He was roused from his reverie by the cold. The town below him had grown darker; and with chattering teeth and cold feet he hastened homewards.

When he at last crept into his den again, and was met by all the musty thoughts, he found that what he had seen was not a boat at all. Home? Humble himself? No, it was too late.

When the woman who cleaned his room for him came in the following day, she found Evje in bed with a cough and high fever; and when she suggested fetching a doctor, he turned his face to the wall and murmured, no. "What in the world should I get well for?" he thought.

Chapter III

Evje Farm is one of the largest in the district, and stands upon green hills, with red farm buildings running up to the fir wood, a white house half hidden by great trees, and a garden stretching down to the fjord. All round there seems to rise from the hills, the wood and the houses, a dull, ceaseless roar. It is from the Evje Fall, which drives the saw, planing, and flour mills of the farm, just inside the bay.

In the house, at one of the windows stood Fru Asta Evje, shading her eyes with her hand as she gazed down the road. Both the hand and the sharp but ruddy face were worn, and the whole figure was ponderous and imposing; but the yellow-white hair was gathered neatly up at the back of her head beneath the black silk cap, and the linen collar round her neck was white and freshly ironed. One could see that she knew how to command, but also how to laugh.

What had become of Lars Brovold with the milk-cart and the letters? She had not received the customary lines from Erik at the beginning of the month, acknowledging the money sent. It was true she had of late years accustomed herself to the thought that this son was lost to her also; but now, when even the sending of those few business-like words was omitted, it was too much for her. What could have happened to him? Each day she waited with increasing uneasiness for the next post.

What could have delayed Lars Brovold today?

Asta Evje had faithfully striven, together with her husband, to work up the farm, and God—as she used to say—had added His blessing. It was bad enough to become a widow, but last year she had suffered a misfortune which threatened to crush her altogether. Her eldest son, who was just about to take over the farm and works in his own name, had suddenly died, leaving no child.

It looked as if the family at Evje were to die out, for Erik, who was now her only child, might almost be regarded as dead. After her loss she had, it is true, once more put herself into harness and been one of the first to rise

and the last to go to rest; but now she was seventy, and would soon not be fit for anything more. Of late she had often been unable to sleep at night for thinking of what she would soon be forced to do—namely, to sell, to let strangers in to the old family house.

It was now, however, at the non-arrival of Erik's letter, that she discovered the hope to which, in spite of everything, she had clung as a last possibility—namely, that some day Erik would come to his senses and return home.

There at last was Lars Brovold with the milk-cart! She went out into the roomy hall, and taking the leather bag from the fair-haired boy, who had just come up the steps, immediately began to turn over the letters in the bag. No, she did not find Erik's well-known handwriting. But there was a telegram! She dared not open it at once, for she felt it was from him; and it was not until she was in the office that she tore it open. She could hear her heart thumping. Was he dead? No, it said—it said:

"Coming home to-morrow. ERIK."

Fru Evje dropped on to the sofa, and sat there with her hands in her lap. At last she looked upwards, as much as to say: "Has my

prayer really been answered?" A little while after she rose with the expression she wore when she gave orders. The courtyard had not been swept and strewn with sand yet this year, nor had the best carriage been washed and brushed, and his old room must be got ready. But as she reached the door, she paused and breathed heavily at the thought that perhaps he was only coming home to go away again.

To-morrow! Fru Evje had to go back to the sofa, where she collapsed. It would all be settled to-morrow. The old lady folded her hands and suddenly began to sob.

It was near the middle of June, and summer had reached even these northern regions. The following day, the little steamer from the town steamed into a perfectly calm fjord. The mountains on both sides, standing like rows of upturned boats, are covered with a blue haze. Towards the open sea they rise like gigantic whales standing guard against the storms, so that the land within can lie in shelter. Even out on the water, the fragrance of the budding woods along the shore is perceptible; and the warmth is so fresh that it is like inhaling a mixture of sunshine and snow.

A small group, consisting of a gentleman and two ladies, was standing apart upon the

after-deck engaged in earnest discussion carried on in subdued tones. It was the Government engineer, Rein, his fair young wife, and their friend, Fröken Inga Rud. They were on their way home from the town.

"Yes; but it is he all the same," said Fru Rein. "There! He's turning his head. Didn't I say so?"

All three cast furtive glances towards the stern of the vessel, where a man was sitting in a deep bamboo chair, with his back towards them. In spite of the warmth, he sat huddled up in a thick ulster. Now and then he threw crumbs of bread out to two gulls that were sailing along behind the vessel.

"Very well, then, say it's he," said Rein, giving way. "But why won't he look at us? Is it because of you, Fröken Rud?"

The young lady blushed, but tried to laugh. It was not her fault that people knew about Erik Evje's unsuccessful wooing.

Rein continued, as he adjusted his pince-nez: "They say he's come down in the world lately. Perhaps the prodigal son's on his way home."

"It's hard on his mother!" said Fru Rein. "Her sons have not brought her much happiness."

"And how dreadful he looks! He's like a consumptive Englishman, who's determined to come to Norway to die."

Inga Rud suddenly left the other two, as if she did not wish to hear more; and with bent head she began to walk backwards and forwards across the deck, now and then stealing a glance at her companions, as if she feared they might guess her thoughts.

She was really agitated at meeting Erik Evje again. It had brought back memories of a time when she had been much admired and constantly surrounded by young men, and when all the world seemed to her like a ballroom filled with music and admiring eyes.

Things were changed since then. The lieutenant she had chosen then, and had been engaged to for several years, had suddenly broken off the engagement last summer, and immediately after had married another girl who was rich. For some weeks after, her parents had fears for her reason; and though she had gradually regained her composure, she was fully convinced that life, for her, was over.

"Ah, then!" she thought, stopping to look at Erik Evje. He belonged to the brightest

years of her life, and she did not like to hear any one speak ill of him.

"But why doesn't he look this way? Is he angry with me, or——?" She did not finish the sentence even to herself.

Erik Evje had discovered his acquaintances on board, but felt the greatest unwillingness to speak to them. He was worn out with illness and emotion, and he had a feeling that the train and the steamer were taking him home without his actually wanting to go, although at the same time he was too tired to want to do anything else. He had sat gazing at these two gulls until they began uncomfortably to resemble Mogstad and the girl in prison. He might fly from them, but they kept with him; and his throwing food to them was for the purpose of detaining them and gaining a moment's respite. But they came again on motionless, outstretched wings. He had no more bread, and he closed his eyes and gave himself up to the thought that had lately enticed him more and more strongly. If he were to give in to his mother, and take over the farm, it would be rather a different matter when he gave away land—to the old head labourer, for instance. It would save something of that for which he had lived hitherto; and as

he sat with closed eyes, now and then hearing the cries of the two birds coming nearer, he withdrew farther and farther into this good intention, and made it bigger and bigger in order to find in it shelter and a defence. He would give land to others besides the head labourer. It would gradually become a colony of labourers along the river, a little world of happy homes, which he had created. Was this to betray his past? Mogstad might stand upon his chair and jeer, but sensible people——

"How do you do, Herr Evje?" said a voice behind him, and he started and turned round. It was Inga Rud.

Erik required a moment to come to himself. He rose, but felt as if the ship were going round. "How do you do?" he stammered at last, seizing hold of the back of the chair to keep himself up.

"You won't recognise old neighbours," she said brightly. A pause ensued, as each saw that the other had turned red, and felt something of a shock at hearing the other's voice. It was she who at last went on: "I suppose you're going home for a summer visit?"

"Yes; that's to say——" He passed his hand across his forehead. Must he confess to this girl what a wretched state he was in? He

looked involuntarily at his fingers, which of course were brown with tobacco, and thought of his untidy hair and beard, and wished himself miles away.

Little by little, however, a conversation was started. They stood leaning over the rail, and perhaps neither of them quite knew what they were talking about. The steamer stopped at a pier that ran out into the water on piles, and people went ashore and others came on board, and then it set off again obliquely across the fjord, leaving a dark furrow behind it on the surface of the water, to call at a similar pier on the other side.

The conversation became easier, although Erik began to feel a growing defiance. "Of course she has come up to me purely out of pity!" he thought. "She knows of my failure in town; she knows that I drink and that I am now drifting home like any wreck. Perhaps she is pleased that everything has gone so wrong with me. I suppose she thinks she hasn't worried me enough yet."

"How delighted your mother will be to have you at home now," she said, smiling.

"Yes," he stammered. "Mother's getting old now." But he was almost confessing that he was going to forswear his past; and for a

moment he gazed helplessly over the water, trying to find some justification, something to raise himself in her eyes, in revenge for her pity.

The idea about the workmen's holdings that had just flitted through his mind was still close at hand; and this woman incited him now to take it up and use it.

"The fact is," he went on, suddenly getting the courage to meet her eyes, "I ought to have gone home long ago. Up to the present I've only written and talked about what others ought to do in this world; but I've never really known whether I can do anything myself."

"Well, this sounds interesting," she said, looking at him intently.

Erik Evje never forgot the moments that followed. How brutal it seemed towards himself to lay bare this idea, which had hitherto only been to him as a remote, sweet dream, and which was not nearly thought out and complete yet. It was almost like holding up to her an unfledged bird, which she could kill merely with an ironical smile. He began almost in a pleading voice, as if asking her to be lenient; but she came to his aid with little remarks that gave him more and more self-confidence, until the contemplated holdings actually grew into a

natural and important matter. Before long he was enjoying the triumph of showing her how mistaken she was, and that she need not waste her pity. He had not gone back on his ideas yet, nor had he come home a total wreck either.

"Why, it's a grand idea, Herr Evje!" she exclaimed enthusiastically. "I wish you every success."

Little by little this feeling of bitter triumph changed into warm pleasure at having risen in her estimation. Involuntarily he looked for the two steely-grey birds, but they were far behind. How nice it was of her to come and speak to him; he felt as if she had lifted his thoughts out of a mouldy cellar. If she thought this grand, then the only thing he had to do was to set about it. He grew more animated, and was surprised to hear himself laugh; and finally, looking up, first at her and then over the water, he exclaimed: "Why, it's summer here!"

She laughed. "Of course it's summer here. Have you only just discovered that?"

Inga Rud was really pleased at having ventured to speak to this man; and as she stood looking at and listening to him, it was not only of him she thought, but of things altogether

different. She found him just what he had been in the old days, just as awkward, just as full of his own plans, just as careless about his personal appearance; and all this of itself took her back more and more to those happy, never-to-be-forgotten years.

They glided past farm after farm with grey or painted buildings toning in with the background of mountain until they were lost in the blue summer haze. The wooded slopes were as silent as if no shot had ever been fired on them. The steamer seemed strangely solitary out here on the wide, lifeless fjord. People had cleared the ground and built here for thousands of years, and yet there were no ruins, no monuments to be seen; all these hundreds of generations had disappeared into the abyss of time, without leaving behind them anything more than a few scattered strips of cultivated land.

"She's just like what she was in the old days," thought Erik, and felt as if he had grown young again, and was meeting her for the first time. She still had a fresh colour and the same beautiful dark eyebrows and soft, black hair; but round her eyes there were now faint traces of much weeping. Yes, he knew what had befallen her, and what that meant.

At this point, the engineer and his wife thought it was about time to disturb the two who seemed to be so enjoying one another's society; and as soon as they came up to them and had shaken hands, Rein began to relate a piece of good news about himself—namely, that he had received a Government scholarship, and was soon going abroad for a year.

"And I'm going with him!" added his wife rapturously. It was of course very nice for them, but Erik and Inga Rud exchanged a quick glance, as if they had been carried away from a mutual pleasure.

In the meantime a carriage was being driven down the avenue from Evje Farm. On the box sat young Lars Brovold, and inside was Fru Evje, with an eager, tired face, looking out over the bay, into which the steamer was moving, with its bow in a wave of foam. When at last the carriage drew up at the trading-place, the vessel was just laying to at the pier. Fru Evje did not feel equal to getting out, and sat looking at the passengers, who were now beginning to walk over the bridge and up the shore. Had he not come? Her heart began to beat. That tall, bearded man in an ulster? Oh no!

"Good-day, mother!" he said, looking towards her.

. . . . .

As Inga Rud's carriage had not arrived in time, she accepted the offer of a seat in the Reins' little chaise; but many a time afterwards did she regret that she had not rather walked.

The chaise was going slowly up a hill when Fru Rein said:

"Well, Inga, what had Erik Evje to say for himself to-day?"

Herr Rein, too, looked curiously at her. She knew that she was the only person to whom Erik had as yet confided his plans, and she would have liked to keep the confidence a secret; but Rein's ironical smile irritated her. Erik Evje was every bit as good as Rein, and, to show him this, she told him about the workmen's holdings. When she had finished, she was a little curious about the effect. What would he say?

"What do you say to that, Ingvald?" asked his wife, turning to him.

Rein looked straight before him for a little while, and cracked his whip once or twice. "The fallow land on the Evje estate?" he

said at last. "That must surely be along by the river?"

"Yes," said Inga, "that's just where he said it was."

"Hm!" And then: "That's rather tiresome."

"Tiresome?" cried both women.

"Yes, unfortunately; for the land there is quite uninhabitable."

"What? Why?"

Until now, Rein had seemed to be joking, but now he continued gravely:

"There can't be any harm in my saying it, I suppose. Last year we were going to try to lay the new railway-line along there, but had to give it up, for the land lies upon a quagmire, as if it were on a volcano. If you clear away the trees that up to the present have kept the hills together, and make holes in the thin crust of earth by digging ditches, it will only need one autumn or spring flood to send the whole of Evje's colony sliding out into the fjord. So it's quite unwarrantable to set people down to live there, even if they're only a few poor workmen."

Both women were silent for some time. They knew what such a quagmire meant—a liquid, deceptive mass of clay, that may be

hidden under the finest land. It had been the cause of many a farm, often a whole district in these parts, sliding out into the fjord, or disappearing as if swallowed up by an abyss.

"Oh, how dreadful!" sighed Inga.

"You always seem to think a thing's unwarrantable when it's to do good, Ingvald!" said Fru Rein a little bitterly.

"Well, well, it hasn't anything to do with me, of course," said Rein, laughing softly; "and we're going away, so I shall certainly not disturb Herr Evje's philanthropic plans."

Inga Rud sat silent, with her head turned away. What had passed seemed to darken her brightest memories, which had become so vivid to-day; and it was as if Erik Evje were about to face some great danger.

But could she warn him? Oh no, that would be too heartless a thing to do!

Chapter IV

Erik's home-coming was a very different thing from that which he had feared. The meeting on board, and his new plans, which had become so real, had given him a new assurance and self-confidence. It was certainly not humbling himself to embrace his mother, and he could safely enjoy the sight of the first Evje hills. The distant sound of the waterfall awakened a number of memories from his childhood; and to-day they seemed brighter than they had ever been before.

And there was the house, with the flag flying in his honour.

At last he was walking about the large rooms at Evje. This was something very different from an attic with a view of sooty roofs and chimneys. With all this space and light, these rooms seemed to be open to the sky and the fjord. "How long you have been away!" were the words he seemed to hear on all sides. "But

all this can now be yours, the land, the forests, horses, houses, furniture, silver and everything." Was it true? And a new, pleasant sensation came over him, the joy of ownership, the ability to settle down here as in a fortified castle, without the possibility of a Mogstad's agitating or voting his dismissal.

He went from room to room, but in the corner room suddenly stopped, and put his hand over his eyes. What was it? Over there on the sofa by the round table he seemed to see his father drinking with the peasants, because the sale of a farm was to be arranged. "Nonsense!" he thought, and hurried out. This was not a thing to think of now; besides his mother had sold the distillery to a company. There were other times and customs at Evje now.

He went out on to the verandah, and leaned over the railing. The grass and flowers were high about the trunks of the apple-trees, whose pink blossom stood out against a background of summer-blue fjord. There was a smell of the sea here, and from the garden rose a flood of perfume; but down among the fruit-trees a little grey-bearded man with a wheel-barrow was moving about, and Erik again felt a slight pang. Was it—he?

"I expect you're both hungry and thirsty," said Fru Evje, coming out to him with a large glass of milk on a tray. She had not yet brought herself to ask him how long he was going to stay at home.

"Mother, who's that man there?"

"That's Peter Tröen. Don't you know our men again?"

Fru Evje did not notice that Erik compressed his lips as if he had had a sudden attack of toothache; but Peter Tröen was the father of Olina, who was in prison, and he had Erik's son to bring up, and yet he was going about his duties here as before. "How am I going to behave to him now?" Erik asked himself, and, as he did so, he seemed to hear Mogstad's scornful laughter.

"Are you going to be home for long?" asked his mother cautiously, not daring to look at him. The answer did not come immediately, and she had to sit down on a chair close to her, for she was trembling with anxiety. She waited for the answer as she would have done for a blow on the head.

"Well, mother, I don't know. I had thought," he said, beginning to pace up and down the verandah, "to stay as long as you liked."

"Erik!" she whispered, but felt unable to get up and throw her arms round him. "Erik!" she repeated, trembling with joy. "Do you really mean it?"

"Mother," he said, stopping in his walk and looking down, "is Bertil Sveen still unmarried?"

"What?" she said, opening her eyes in astonishment that anything so unimportant as the head labourer and his engagement could exist now.

Erik had to repeat his question, looking anxiously at his mother.

"Oh, Bertil? Oh yes, he's exactly as he was. But why do you ask? Come here, Erik!" She smiled with tears in her eyes. He went to her and kissed her on both cheeks. He felt an especial pleasure in the knowledge that the man was still unable to make enough to marry upon, for then his plan of helping him would not be in vain; the beginning, at any rate, of his undertaking was assured.

During the next few days there was no lack of little, painful impressions to be faced, and it would have been hard for him to keep in good spirits as he did, without these plans for the labourers' holdings to counterbalance them. They followed him like a good genie

that held him by the hand and said: "Never mind! When once you set to work on this, everything will be all right."

He learned that his mother had gone to law about a salmon-fishing right, with some fishermen out on the shore; and this brought before him a vision of those toil-worn men in their little cottages along the rocks. The salmon-fishing was the half of life to them, and yet his mother actually wanted to take it from them, and the law and society would help her. Would he have to take over this lawsuit too, and go on with it, or leave his mother in the lurch? He was still more pained when she told him one day that she was going to dismiss one of the maids, because the girl was going to have her second child. "The first time," she said, "I was sorry for her, but now, upon my word, she expects to stay with number two as well! Oh, the servants one gets nowadays!"

"This is Olina's story over again!" thought Erik. The child's father was young Lars Brovold. "Perhaps he has promised to marry her—as I did that time. Will I allow her to be sent away?"

But was he going to begin at once to set himself up against this mother of his, to whom he had already been the cause of so much

sorrow, and by whose care for him he was now touched twenty times a day? She seemed to do nothing but go about pondering how she could give him some little pleasure. It was all so unspeakably nice after being so miserable as he had been. Her way of speaking to him, too, had become so submissively cautious that he felt an involuntary desire to spare her, to kiss her on both cheeks and say that she was always right.

For the present he might well rest, and forget all the darkness from which he came; only eat and sleep and go quietly about and collect his thoughts. "When once I get my plans started," he thought, "everything will come right."

It was a pleasure to go to his room at night, the room in which he and his brother had slept in the old days; to open the window to the light summer night, and let the breeze from the fjord blow the curtain about while he slept; to wake late to find the room full of sunshine and to see his mother, fresh and smiling, coming in with his coffee; to go about all day long without meeting enemies; to lie on a bank in the sun, gazing at the sky and the fjord, and let the time pass. Behind those mountains, it is true, there lies a town, and in that

town there are two persons, who—— Nonsense! "I wish you every success, Herr Evje." It would be better for him to think whether he should call upon her parents. "Suppose I were to be successful in love some day!" And the grasshoppers chirped in the warm grass, the sun shone warm on his closed eyelids, and the waterfall and the river sang their song out into the air.

When he went round the fields and meadows with his mother, while she tried to make him acquainted with the conditions of the place, he felt as if she were enticing his thoughts, so that they should all come home again.

If only there had been no memories!

As the days passed, he felt greater safety in being close to his mother. She looked at everything from such a healthy point of view; she was so strong and tireless, always busy, with a thousand things in her head, at one moment with the farm labourers and the workpeople, the next in the office, giving orders to the farm and forest overseers, and immediately afterwards in the kitchen and larder, and always lively, whether she scolded or laughed. She had had many difficulties to overcome, and had worked hard; but she was still like a young woman. One day she came in with a

pair of scissors, and made him sit down, saying: "I really will not see you with that hair and beard any longer! We're going to shear sheep to-morrow, but to-day you shall have a turn. A young man, who's soon going courting! For shame!"

During the operation, Erik happened to say: "Fancy! It must be at least twenty years since you cut my hair, mother."

"Any one would think it was thirty," she answered.

Her good spirits and energy infected him, and he began to help her. He sat in his father's chair in the office and wrote her letters; and he went about among the workpeople and farm hands, and gave them her orders. Gradually, as he obtained information from her about the work, he came imperceptibly to think that, after all, what she said was best and would be the best way to go on in the future.

He had a feeling that he was drifting quietly along, with his eyes closed to everything that was painful, and with a dim perception of an inferno of thoughts which he would like to keep covered up. On rare occasions, however, a voice would make itself heard, and wake him up. "How is this going

to end? Why do I say nothing to mother about my plans?"

Good heavens, could he not be left in peace for a little while!

One day he went with his mother to call on the families in the neighbourhood, and as they approached the parish doctor's long yellow-painted buildings, his heart beat with excitement at the thought of seeing Inga Rud again. She was not at home; but as they drove away from the house, Erik was sure he caught a glimpse of her up at an attic window. "So she will not meet me," he thought. "Well, I might have known as much."

It was a little sad to return to Evje Farm. It was as if the golden idea that had been his daily comfort had lost its beautiful dark eyebrows.

"No one cares about me but mother," he thought; "and I was going to offend her."

But if any one was happy just now, it was Fru Evje. She had never dreamt that Erik could be so accommodating and sensible about everything; but, whenever she noticed him grow silent and melancholy, she felt a secret terror that he might suddenly take it into his head to go away again. "If I let him take over the whole thing," she thought, "he

would marry, and then he would settle down all right."

Something of the same sort was in Erik's mind too. And one day they drove to the district magistrate's to get the papers signed; and when they drove back, Erik was owner of Evje Farm with its forests and works. Fru Evje breathed a sigh of relief, for now her only son was bound to her and the farm. It was, indeed, strange to let go her hold of it all; but in the meantime everything would go on as before, and that was the main thing.

When Erik the next day went over the fields to look at the crops, he was in a strange mood. He was master here now: all this was his. He once more heard voices from an inferno that he would like to keep closed. They were remembrances of his own speeches and articles against private ownership of land. "Is this land," he thought, and he rubbed his eyes, "that I'm walking on, really mine to-day? It wasn't yesterday. Is it I who have cleared and tilled it, since it suddenly belongs to me? And those twelve horses tethered there—I may now kill, or sell, or ill-treat, or use, just as I like. That's what it is to own something."

It was the same thing when he came to the sawmills, where the wheels hummed and

people ran backwards and forwards among the timber and planks, and were very busy. He had to ask himself why this waterfall drove the wheels for him, and why these workmen toiled and sweated to earn money just for his pocket. "I haven't myself worked an hour here; I haven't lifted a finger to set it going; and yet—and yet—— What did I write once?"

In this way Erik's life as a large landed proprietor began. It was not once only that he felt ashamed, but on the other hand he often felt a desire to give a kick to feelings such as these, as though they had been Mogstad again suddenly appearing and wanting to drive him out of this position too. But he really meant to put much that was crooked here straight, and then there were the labourers' holdings.

But now, when at last he had a free hand and could at once realise his beautiful idea, now he kept on putting it off. It had been so easy to give away land when he had none; but now? In the course of a few weeks he had awakened to the fact that one's land, forests and works are more than dead property; together they form one's home, and in time will become more and more part of oneself. Here he had been raised up again after the bitter

defeats he had suffered out in the world; here he was master, and could drive Mogstad away with a riding-whip, without putting it to the vote. Here he would remain for the rest of his life, like his forefathers. To his mother the giving away of the land of the farm would be like cutting off pieces of her own flesh. And he himself?

Then there were the reforms. And again he awoke to the fact that it is easier to write about reforms in a newspaper, than to carry them out. He sincerely meant to increase the workmen's daily wage; but when he had discussed the matter with the fat, red-haired overseer of forests, it ended with his having to acknowledge that that experienced man was right in saying that it was not the time for that just now. He even had to agree to that which had in his opinion been the worst thing in his father's business, the continual purchase of farms—for the purpose of plundering the forest. The forest overseer made him see that it was the only way of insuring a supply of timber for the saw and planing mills; so it would have to go on, for the present.

This large branch of the business was like a huge machine, working on unchangeably;

and he had not the courage to interfere and alter the smallest wheel, for fear of disturbing the whole. He would not for all the world commit follies and become homeless once more.

But how was it going to end?

One Sunday morning, while the church bells were ringing, he came, when wandering over the fields, upon the remains of a house. He came to a sudden halt, and turned away as if he had seen a ghost. He remembered distinctly how his father had had an execution sale at this house, and how he had seen the man, with his wife and children, go from it empty-handed, brought to beggary by his father. The house became part of Evje, and so easy a conscience had his father, that he had not even removed the traces of the house to wipe out the remembrance of his act. "You have inherited this, Erik," said a well-known voice. "It's a fine inheritance you have to take up. Look here, good people! Didn't I say so?"

When Erik returned to the house, his mother, in a black silk dress, was standing before the mirror in the drawing-room, arranging her bonnet. "Are you going out, mother?" he asked, dropping into a chair.

"I'm going to church, of course," she an-

swered; and he saw that she was on the point of asking him to go with her, but kept silence to spare him.

"How pale you are, Erik!" she said, looking at him anxiously. "Don't you sleep well here in the country?"

Erik tried to smile. "Oh yes! There's nothing the matter with me. But I happened to pass the place where that neighbour of ours lived, who—who sold his house to father. I remember they had a little girl—Kirsten, I think was her name—whom I often played with when I was a small boy. She was so neat and pretty, and always wore a red ribbon in her hair. Do you know at all what's become of them?"

His mother shook her head.

"What a pity that things should have gone so badly with them!" Erik exclaimed, looking at his mother in the hope of a reassuring answer.

Fru Evje sighed into the mirror, as she tied her bonnet-strings. "Ah yes, the Lord sometimes punishes severely," she said. "You don't know what a wicked house that was!" And in her voice there was such sincere assurance that the ejection of their neighbour

was the Lord's doing, that Erik felt inclined both to laugh and to cry.

"Good-bye!" she said, with a little sigh, going towards the door.

Erik remained standing on the verandah, watching his mother as she drove down the avenue in the pony-chaise.

"That's what it is to believe in a God!" he thought. "You can do anything, and yet sleep and be just as cheerful. But I—who am alone!" A strange feeling of giddiness came over him, and he had to sit down; and once more he heard voices from a lower world, to which he would not listen in the day's activity: "How is it going to end? Why do you always avoid meeting old Peter Tröen? Why are you ashamed to look at the maidservant Petra, who is going to be dismissed? Why don't you start your workmen's holdings scheme? Were all your youthful ideals nothing but empty words? What is there left? Why, the labourers whose wages are not to be raised, the land of a neighbour whom your father brought to beggary, the plundered forests, the lawsuit with the fishermen, shares in a distillery—that's what you have to live for in the future!"

He covered his face with his hands. "Have I drifted ashore here, and am I nailed fast to

all this? I shall soon be exactly like my father, and shall live his life; and my soul will rot inch by inch."

When Fru Evje returned from church, she found Erik sitting in a wicker chair on the verandah, with a bottle beside him and a cigar-end in the corner of his mouth. She stood still and gazed at him, and he smiled an idiotic smile. He was dead-drunk.

Chapter V

A green-painted sloop, laden with timber, was moving slowly out upon the fjord, whose waters reflected the ruddy glow of evening, with here and there the blue trail of a puff of wind thrown upon their surface. At Hustad Farm, on the other side of the fjord, the evening bell begins to ring, and is immediately answered by the bell at Evje. The slow strokes go on sounding for some time, because the girl at Hustad and the cook at Evje know one another's way of ringing, and think it fun to have a little chat in this way from either side of the fjord. Out in the fields where the haymaking has begun, work ceases, the horses are unharnessed and tethered, and the girls shoulder their rakes and are the first to make their way to the farm.

Young Lars Brovold took his time so as to be the last. He dreaded having to sit down with the others, for latterly he had had to put

up with many gibes about Petra. Now, fortunately, she would not have many more days at the farm, and a good thing too!

Lars was a big fellow of twenty, with fair hair and broad shoulders. He was a general favourite, being just as cheerful when working hard as when playing the fiddle at a dance, or singing songs with a girl on his knee. He was considered quite a hero by the servants at Evje, because he could venture to jest with the mistress herself.

He stopped on his way up the hill, wiped the perspiration from his forehead, and sighed as he turned to the fjord; for it was and always would be inconceivable how, at Christmas, he should have been so intoxicated as to make his way into that girl's room, and she not young either. Was it so certain, after all, that he was the child's father? There was another girl up the valley, called Kristina; and she had the most beautiful voice in the church, and a waist as supple as a willow-wand. But now, when he was bantered by the whole countryside, Knut Rabben would get her after all.

Lars dropped on to the bank, and pulled a blade of grass, which he began to chew. If he were to go into the military college in the autumn, and came home at Christmas and

showed himself at church in his uniform, that might perhaps help to put matters straight. He had better make up his mind to do something.

When at last he entered the house, the others were half-way through their supper, and the spoons were busy with the porridge plates, while the red light from the sun fell across two long rows of perspiring, weather-beaten faces. The shoemaker, sitting by the window, had not yet left his work, but was hammering at a sole. To Lars's relief, no one seemed to notice him; but there was some tittering and whispering going on about something that it was better not to speak too loud about. When Lars had taken his seat at the bottom of the table with his spoon, he found out that it was about the family. Something must have happened. Young Herr Evje had not been seen for a couple of days, and Fru Evje's face showed traces of tears; but there was nothing to be got out of the maids in the house. What could have happened?

Töger, the shoemaker, rose at last, took off his leather apron, removed the quid from his mouth, and limped up to take his place at the table. As he did so, a fair-haired girl came in from the kitchen with more milk, and be-

hind her, through the half-open door, a little red-haired boy slipped into the room. The shoemaker twisted round upon his short leg, and caught hold of the little boy, who was dressed in a tunic. "Hi, boy, come here and you shall have some porridge!" he said, lifting the child up on his arm. A laugh began to go round the table. The boy strove to free himself, and began to scream; and the next moment a big, red-haired girl came rushing in from the kitchen, seized the boy, and swept out again, banging the kitchen door after her, and leaving the shoemaker with a quizzical look on his face. "My goodness, Petra!" he cried. "Even if we took your boy, you know quite well that you'll soon have another."

Lars Brovold turned fiery red, and the porridge nearly choked him; for now he expected he would get it.

He was right, too. When the shoemaker had begun his porridge he remarked, without addressing any one in particular: "Ah well, Petra has a great liking for young people."

The others tittered and looked at Lars. He, however, meant to stop old Peter Tröen's mouth at any rate, and cried, as he brought down his fist upon the table: "You can just hold your tongue about it, Peter! Perhaps

your daughter's going to marry Evje when she comes out of prison, is she?"

This was a little too pointed for all to laugh at it, but the hand of the old grey-bearded man began to tremble, so that the milk splashed out of his spoon. He brushed away the spilt liquid with a quick movement of his hand, and said: "Oh, you don't need to trouble about my daughter, Lars; she'll get a ticket to take her to America as soon as she needs it."

At this point the door opened, and silence fell. It was Bertil Sveen, the head labourer, who entered. The big man, with the small brown beard under his chin, walked with a heavy step across the floor, opened an old bureau standing against the other wall, and placed something in a drawer. But just as the sloping lid descended, a photograph became visible to all. It was sunk into the wood on the inside of the lid, and they all knew that it was that of the woman on the other side of the fjord, to whom he had been engaged for fifteen years. It was an engagement that was universally laughed at; but Bertil had lost all his savings by standing surety for his brother, and he still had to pay upon that debt. So the marriage was put off again and again, because

the elderly couple could not afford to live together.

"How's your sweetheart?" asked Lars Brovold, in order to turn the conversation from himself. All the others at the table looked at him with wide-open eyes, as much as to say, "You'd better be careful!"

Bertil did not appear to have heard. He locked the bureau, came slowly across the room, and seated himself at the table, on the bench running along the wall. He then reached over his shoulder for his spoon, which he kept in a crack in the log wall, stroked the bowl with his hand, and began to eat.

The low room, with its windows darkened with plants in pots, gradually became unbearably hot. The sun was still sending a stream of red light across the floor, and swarms of flies buzzed about the milk and porridge on the table, and settled on the hot faces of the men and women. The women, one after another, laid down their spoons, got up with a little sigh, and left the table to get their handkerchiefs to tie over their heads.

Once more the door opened, and the housemaid from the house put in her blond head. "Evje wants to speak to the head man!" she said at haphazard, withdrew her head again,

and was gone. The men at the table looked at one another, as if this meant something unusual. There would soon be news to hear from the house.

Bertil took another spoonful or two before he turned his head and growled "Oh"; but, when he had gone on eating a little while longer, he wiped his spoon upon the palm of his hand, and put it back in its place in the wall. If he was to go actually into the house, he had better make himself a little tidy; and therefore, when half-an-hour later he crossed the yard with his thumbs in his waistcoat pockets, he had washed his face and hands, and changed his trousers.

In the meantime Lars Brovold was quietly shaving himself in his little room, although there was not much to take off. When he had finished, he put on his best clothes, put his new short pipe with the silver lid in his waistcoat pocket, and his blue cap upon his fair hair, and set off down the sandy white road to Viken. He was free this evening, and he had an idea that a certain young woman would be coming into the shop, as it was post day; and she might as well know about the military college.

Fortune favoured him, for he had not sat

long upon the rocks above the shop, before he saw her coming down the road among some others. She had a basket on her arm, and was dressed in a dark dress, with a black handkerchief on her head. She was walking quickly and swinging her disengaged arm, all unaware who was sitting there.

It happened that he was standing at the counter when she came in, buying a packet of sweets and some tobacco and matches; for he did not want it to look as if he had been waiting for her. She reddened a little at sight of him, and then said, looking at the bag of tobacco: "That doesn't make you ill now, I suppose?" He was delighted at her speaking to him, but looked consequential and said that it was a good long time since he was a child. And then it also happened that he was ready and was just going when she went.

She allowed him to carry her breakfast for her, and the two young people set off up the road. He found out that she was the only person in the whole countryside who was not sunburnt. She had a little scar in the corner of her mouth, from a fall that she had had when skiing at the time when they were at school together. Whenever he said anything, she gave him a sidelong glance and laughed. "What

nonsense!" she said, and tried to be serious. "That's all rubbish, of course!" "It's as true as I stand here!" he said earnestly, although he did not really know what he had been talking about, so glad was he that she let him go with her.

But to return to Bertil Sveen. When he entered the house, he knocked, as was his wont, at the office door, opened it slowly and went in. He found Fru Evje sitting there with her hands in her lap; but on seeing him she started up, saying: "What is it, Bertil?" The man at last managed to tell her that Herr Evje had sent for him, at which Fru Evje seemed very much astonished. "No, really? Did he send for you? Well, you must go up to his room, and try knocking."

She stood listening intently to Bertil's heavy step upon the stairs, and then she heard the key really turned in the lock up there, and the man admitted. Why he especially? What was the meaning of this? She waited and waited for Bertil to come down again; but the clock on the wall struck once, and then again. What was going on upstairs?

When Bertil entered Erik's room, he was met by a close smell of tobacco and spirits. The bed was unmade, the washing-basin was

full of dirty water, and Erik himself was standing in the middle of the room in his shirt and trousers. He looked hard at Bertil, and made no answer when the man said "Good-evening." He looked at him as if he would find out whether he was really to be his rescuer; for it had to be now. The house might tumble down, his mother go out of her wits, and his father turn in his grave, but if he himself was to be able to live, he must regain a little self-respect. For the moment he was like a drowning man, who clutches at anything by which he can keep himself up. Would this prove to be more than a straw?

"Sit down, Bertil!" he said at last, and lay down on the sofa. Bertil seated himself upon a chair that seemed much too small for so big a man.

"Are you not well?" he ventured to say. Erik did not answer, but closed his eyes for a moment to collect his thoughts. The ticking of his watch, as it lay on the table, could be heard in the silence. At length he opened his eyes.

"How long have you served on the farm now, Bertil?"

"It'll be twenty-five years this autumn,"

answered the man, with a look of surprise. Was he going to be dismissed?

"Shouldn't you soon be thinking of getting married?"

The middle-aged bachelor smiled an embarrassed smile, but in a little while, looking down at his hands, answered: "Oh, I shall soon be too old for that, I suppose."

Erik could not help smiling at the other's embarrassment. He knew that of all things their love affairs are what this class of men most dislike to discuss.

"Is it true, Bertil, that five years ago you had saved up enough money to marry on, but then lost it all through your brother?"

Bertil kicked out one leg. "Ye-hes, it was so, worse luck."

"And before that again, you and your sweetheart had waited for ten years until her mother died, because the old lady was so set against your marrying one another, and your girl wouldn't leave her, because she was bedridden?"

Bertil's big face reddened, but after a while he allowed that this, too, was true.

Erik began to feel a strange pleasure in occupying himself with the other's affairs; and now that he was at last going to bring out his

trump card, he felt a warm glow as of personal happiness.

"I say, Bertil," he began. His voice trembled, and he involuntarily closed his eyes. "We owe you a lot here at Evje. If you'd only had fifty krones a year more for the twenty-five years, that, with the interest, would have made a nice sum. But now I want to ask you whether you'll take a piece of uncultivated land instead. There's such a lot of it up the river, and it'll never be cleared by me. Of course you'd have the right to fell timber and take wood for firing in the Evje forest; and for the present you could go on living and having your meals here as before, if you liked, while you worked for yourself, that is to say after the hay-making's over, for we can't do without you-while that's going on. And if your sweetheart likes to move over here at once, you can have the wedding here; and then when the hay's in, we'll help you to get your house built by the winter. What do you say to that, Bertil?"

He had spoken quickly, as if the words burnt his mouth; but now he opened his eyes. It was said, and he breathed a sigh of relief, like a man who has taken a foolhardly leap and accomplished it safely. The thing was done,

and could not be undone. It was no longer true that he was a coward; no, it was not true.

A long silence ensued, while Bertil sat smiling like a man who understands nothing. Was Erik ill, or drunk, or was he joking? Bertil got up, brushed his yellow hair over to one side, and looked as if he did not know whether to go, or stay, or sit down again, or say something. The smile on his face grew broader and broader with irresolution; but finally he slowly crossed the floor to the window to look, as was his custom when he wanted to think, across the fjord to the cottage where Ingeborg lived.

Erik began to be uneasy. Why did the man not speak? And what if he said "No, thank you"? It would cut like a knife. His feverish pulling of himself together for this courageous action would have been done in vain.

At last Bertil cleared his throat and turned towards him. "But," he said hesitatingly, "what does it mean? How much should I have to pay?"

"Nothing, Bertil. You've paid enough during those twenty-five years, I should think. Perhaps you'll get neighbours too."

But Bertil still could not feel sure that there was not something behind all this.

"Should I be your tenant then?" he asked doubtfully.

"No, no, confound it!" cried Erik impatiently, beginning to explain again that Bertil was to receive about ten acres of land for his long and faithful service. "But perhaps you don't want it, Bertil?"

"Don't want it!" Bertil laughed.

Fru Evje's patience was at last rewarded by hearing the stairs creak ominously under Bertil's steps; and she opened the door and signed to him to come into the office. He did so slowly, but with a beaming face.

"Well, Bertil?" she said. She did not need to say any more, for the man came up to her with his great hand outstretched, and a smile on one side of his face.

"I suppose I have to thank you, too, for this," he said. "But it's almost too much. God bless you!"

"Why, what is it, Bertil?"

In reply, the man told her hesitatingly and a little bashfully of the gift he had received.

"Erik's been giving him brandy!" thought Fru Evje. "Indeed, Bertil," she said aloud, looking hard at him, "you've got both land and a house, did you say?"

"Ten acres of land up the valley," Bertil

went on, "and not a farthing to pay for it! Did you ever hear anything like it? But you know about it, I suppose."

"Oh yes, I know about it," she said, with a strange laugh. She would have liked to box the man's ears. "But sit down, Bertil, and tell me a little about it."

When at last the man left her, she had to open the window to get some air; and then she sat on as she had done before, with her hands in her lap, and staring helplessly at the floor.

It was near midnight, and Erik was still walking up and down in the same scanty attire, quite confused with what had happened. Alas, during the last few days, he had been in a dizzy world of mist, but now he had perhaps found a firm foothold again. "Is it true?" he asked himself again and again. "Did I really manage it? Have I really succeeded in rescuing a little of myself again?"

He felt like a man benumbed with cold, who has at last lighted a little fire and is stretching out his stiff hands over it. And the more he thought about Bertil Sveen's happiness, the higher this fire rose and the warmer he felt. "Now I suppose he's sitting and making up some sort of a letter to her," he thought. "And

when she's read it, she'll perhaps turn up her sleeves and try to write some sort of answer." And he laughed.

He opened the window and leaned out in the fresh night air. The grass in the uncut meadows was heavy with the dew, and down in the reddish waters of the fjord the dark pine-clad hills, green slopes and sleeping farmsteads on the opposite shore were reflected. Farther still the sky itself had melted into the world below, while ruddy, sunwarmed clouds rose out of a far-off blue abyss; and above it all a solitary sea-bird was sailing in towards the land.

But was not that Bertil going down the hill towards the water, and so late? He was surely never going to—— Yes, he was putting his shoulder to a boat and pushing it into the water. In the very middle of the hay-making season he was giving up his night and rest to bring the news to Ingeborg himself! Now he was rowing out over the smooth red water, dipping his oars into golden clouds.

"He shall sleep until midday to-morrow," thought Erik.

As he was preparing to go to bed, and had just filled a tumbler with whiskey, Erik seemed to wake up. He suddenly felt as if

some one had taken hold of his arm, and he involuntarily put down the glass and looked about him. What was it? Well, perhaps he would be able to sleep without it to-night. He thought of those two who would bless him to-night, and felt inclined to throw the glass out of the window. Finally he placed it on the table by his bedside, and got into bed; but he lay turning restlessly this way and that, tortured with the desire for the accursed liquid. As long as he could keep his thoughts on Bertil and Ingeborg, it was all right; but what would happen to-morrow? How would he meet his mother after this? Would he be able to go on as he had planned or—— And almost before he knew what he was about, he had started up and emptied the glass in two or three gulps. Then he was soon lying in the same dizzy mist, and at the foot of his bed stood, he thought, Bertil and Ingeborg, blessing him, but also saying that he was far too good to drink like that.

Is it not too late to leave off? Can he still be saved? "Help me!" he groaned, clasping his hands and stretching them out towards the good action he had just done. "Help me, since there is no God!"

It was past midnight, and everything was

still on land and sea. Up on the hill, however, Lars Brovold was lying under a tree, whistling up to the sky. He had taken the short cut home through the wood, for he was far too happy to wish to meet anyone. He had been going to sleep at his parents' that night, in the little grey fisherman's cottage on the headland; but then he had happened to throw himself down under a fir-tree to sing a song and to think a little, and it was so nice to lie there. The pine-needles under him were so warm, and all the birds in the forest were silent. He was thinking of the time when he was a boy and minded goats on the mountains, and played on a horn, and how he would often gather up everything that played and sang in his mind into a kind of old wordless song and send it far out through the horn, over the distant plateaux.

"Oh, doodeli doo!
Oh, doodeli doo!
Oh, doodeli, doodeli doo!"

It was true he lay here whistling, but in his fancy he was blowing a horn; and he gathered it all together—the light night, the sunny-clouded sky, the red fjord, Kristina's having been so nice to him that day, and his going to

the military college and coming home at Christmas in uniform, ha ha!—all together into the old wordless song, which he blew into the horn and far away into the wide sky and over the distant plateaux.

"Oh, doodeli doo!
Oh, doodeli doo!
Oh, doodeli, doodeli doo!"

When at last he got up from the ground, the sky behind the hills in the east was flaming blood-red. It was morning. It was too late to go to bed now, but at any rate he could go down to his parents' cottage, and take a scythe and mow for an hour before he went up to Evje. It would make his father wonder who had helped him with his mowing in the night.

Chapter VI

Waking the next morning was a very different thing to Erik from what it had been before. He did not lie on, dreading having to get up and begin a painful activity. To-day it seemed as if something particularly nice and bright were waiting for him; so he made haste to get up, and walked about humming while he dressed. Everything seemed much easier and brighter than it had done for a long time; and he felt sure that a new time was beginning for him. The action, to perform which he had pulled himself together yesterday, really felt like something secure to hold fast to; and, having taken the first step, he would surely be able to go on.

When he entered the dining-room, his mother was already seated at the breakfast-table. She looked up with a frightened expression, and returned an almost inaudible answer to his greeting; but he was so taken up

with the thought of defending what had happened yesterday, and of at last asserting his will beside hers, that he quite forgot to be ashamed of his intoxication.

"Will the storm soon burst?" he thought, when he had seated himself at the table, and she had poured out his coffee. They both tried to say something, but the attempts were unsuccessful. It hurt him to see how worn she looked, and how little appetite she had; and at last he took her hand and kissed it, saying, with a little guilty smile: "Forgive me, mother!"

It needed only this to make Fru Evje burst into tears; but when she had calmed down a little, he went on courageously: "Just think! Bertil and Ingeborg can marry at last."

She gave him another frightened look. She had hoped that what he had done yesterday had been done in a state of intoxication, and that it could be undone; and she could hardly believe her own ears when he went on: "It surely can't be right, mother, for me to keep all that uncultivated land, while men like Bertil haven't as much as a plot of ground big enough to build a cottage upon?"

Fru Evje only shook her head, and looked straight before her. This was getting worse

and worse. She did not dare to begin to speak about it, for she felt that if she did there would be a perfect storm.

To-day Erik went about his usual occupations, and thought he had not had such a pleasant day since he came home. The farm labourers were industrious, and looked at him so kindly; and he found himself joking with the girls who were raking. There was a great deal of hay at Evje this year, and the weather had been all that could be desired; timber prices had risen, and to-day he had the right to rejoice over all this; he even began to think of enlarging the mill, so that that might become a larger business. Why, he felt he could be the gayest and the most capable of them all, if only he could get these secret wounds healed, that never gave him any rest! What had happened yesterday really felt like a cooling plaster, but it was not enough.

Erik no longer tried to account to himself for the importance that his plans about the labourers' holdings had acquired for him, nor why the fate of the girl Petra made him personally ashamed. He only had an indistinct feeling that he silenced that confounded Mogstad when he now forced himself to do something in the matter.

It was after supper that he went into the men's quarters, and asked for Lars Brovold; and, hearing that the young fellow was up in his little attic mending shoes, he went straight up to him.

Lars was sitting humming to himself while he pegged the sole of a shoe; and he was utterly confused when no less a person than Herr Evje entered. Erik sat down on a chest against the wall, lighted his pipe, and began to talk about various things. He was a little embarrassed on account of what he had come to say, for it was like sitting in judgment on himself.

"Well, Lars?" he said at last. "I hear you're a favourite with the girls!"

The young fellow broke into a laugh. He was thinking of Kristina, whom he yesterday——

"What have you thought about for your future, Lars?"

Lars hammered away at his shoe-sole for a little before he ventured to say, without looking up: "What do you think about the military college?"

"He wants to run away from her," thought Erik, "and to town, as I did that time." And town! To Erik it was now the place where he

had wasted the years of his youth, until one day he found himself drifting along with a bottle as his only comforter.

"You're not thinking of going to town, Lars, are you?" And Erik began to explain what awaited a healthy country lad in those accursed towns. He had tried it himself, and he would rather never set foot in a town again.

Lars looked up in alarm. He had never thought of that; but at any rate it was nice of a man like Evje to sit there and talk in such a friendly way with him.

Soon, however, Erik began to talk of how much a girl like Petra was to be pitied; and he had not said many words before his voice showed how much he was moved. He was soon so deep in painful memories of himself and Olina, and so filled with a desire to make up for it again, that Lars, as he sat there, actually seemed to be himself when he was twenty.

Lars had flushed a deep red. If it had been any one else who had come to him and suggested that he should marry Petra, that person would have gone head first out of the window; but this was different. There was no admonishing, no upbraiding, no preaching; it was all kindness, and it was Herr Evje himself who condescended to sit here and talk

quietly to him, as if he had been his own brother.

"I'm sure Petra's both a clever and a good-natured girl," said Erik at last. He felt as if he were saying a few poor words of praise about some one else.

Lars hammered a peg into the sole. He could not deny it; Petra was both good-natured and clever, especially now when Herr Evje himself was sitting and praising her so.

"I've known a case like this once before," continued Erik, almost as if it were a painful confession; "and I can tell you one thing, and that is that the man who was the father of the child hardly had another happy day."

Lars threw another alarmed glance at Erik. He had not thought of that either—perhaps never having another happy day!

Erik then began to speak of what he would do to help him to marry Petra. Lars sat with the shoe in one hand and the awl in the other, looking towards the window. Land, a house—like Bertil! He, the son of a farm labourer, was to become a freeholder!

But the girl with the supple waist and the most beautiful voice in the church? Himself in uniform, at Christmas? Ah no! That was all nonsense.

Erik spoke so earnestly, and with such warmth in his voice, that it reminded Lars how he had once been begged to go out to sea one stormy night to rescue some men who were clinging to the keel of an upturned boat. Should he be brave this time too?

When at length Erik went down, he passed through the kitchen, where Petra was standing washing-up cups. The tall, red-haired girl was ready to sink through the floor with shame at being seen in her present condition by Herr Evje; but Erik patted her on the shoulder and said: "Accept my congratulations, Petra!"

"What?" she exclaimed, turning round; for she thought this must either be a sneer or a jest.

"Oh, you just wait until Lars tells you!" he said, laughing, and passed on.

Out of doors the evening was calm and cloudy, with the fjord as smooth and grey as the sky. Erik had no desire to go to bed yet, and sauntered down towards the garden gate with his hands in his pockets.

To-morrow it would be still easier to go about here than to-day. It was as though some of a torturing debt had been paid, and the thought of Olina would no longer be so oppressively painful.

Down in the garden he stood and looked at the white house, which needed painting. He was going to make things look nice at Evje now.

Up in the attic stood Lars Brovold, leaning against the wall and staring down at the floor. What had happened? He had made up his mind to go and meet Kristina again next Saturday evening, but he only now began to realise that he could not after what had happened. That was all over now, over for always; and instead—there was Petra.

In a dazed way he put on his jacket, and went down the hill. He must go home to his parents, and consult them about this.

When he came up again about midnight, he was calmer. His parents' delight over what had happened had infected him too. He, who had hitherto not been considered quite grown up, had suddenly become a landowner, had been put on the same footing as the head man, Bertil, who was given the land as a reward for long and faithful service. Lars could not help thinking of Knut Rabben; if that fellow really got Kristina after all, what in the world would those two have to marry upon?

When he came up to the servants' quarters,

he stole softly into the kitchen attic, where Petra slept alone. She woke and started up in bed; and when she saw it was Lars, who had been so rude to her of late, she told him to go. What did he want there? Should she have to call for help?

At last he got her to be quiet enough to hear what he had to say. It was a little difficult to get out a proposal; but at any rate it was clear enough that they together had got land and a house.

Petra lay silent, looking up at the ceiling, which was dotted with flies. Then she turned towards the little red-haired boy, who lay beside her, and tucked the clothes in better at his back, as if it were a little caress, and once more lay looking up at the ceiling. At last she said coldly: "I don't believe it, and wouldn't if it were the priest himself who said it."

"Wait till to-morrow then, you silly, and then you'll hear it."

Neither of them had ever dreamt that they would become man and wife. But now the minds of both were filled with the thought of this unexpected wealth that had suddenly brought them together. It raised them both out of the same poverty, and provided for their future.

He was a little embarrassed, and could not bring himself even to stroke her cheek; but, as he rose to go, she exclaimed anxiously, as if she were suddenly going to lose both him and the land: "Are you going to leave me, Lars?" It sounded as if she were already his careful wife, who called him home to his meals, up there on their land.

Well, he would stay a little longer. He sat down again on the side-board of the bed, and felt with his hand over the skin bedcover until he found the boy's head. "Poor little fellow!" he said. "I shall be waking him."

This was more than Petra could bear. She was so touched at Lars's beginning to be kind to her poor boy, that she began to cry. This made Lars think that there was no help for it, and he must begin to show her a little kindness too. He noticed that she had happened to move closer up to the wall, and, as they had much to talk about now, he might just as well lie down beside her.

That evening Erik fought another fight against that miserable glass. Once more, from habit, he had filled it when he was going to get into bed; and once more it seemed as if some one took hold of his arm, so that he awoke

to what he was doing just as he was about to put it to his lips.

He mastered himself sufficiently to put it down on the table, and then began to walk up and down, barefoot, upon the cool floor. "Why in the world should I empty that stuff into myself?" he thought despairingly. It was necessary perhaps during that time when he had been afraid of the night, and when it tortured him to stand alone and face the ruin he had wrought; but was it not different now?

Involuntarily his thoughts turn to the people he has made happy, and who now bless him. After this they would be with him like a good genie, who took his part. Yes, of course it was different now from what it had been.

But when at last he was comfortably under the clothes, Mogstad came again, that accursed fixed idea that he has not yet been able to overcome, and he stands up on a chair, pointing and saying: "All this about Petra is only begging the question. Why do you still keep out of Peter Tröen's way? Have you courage enough to acknowledge before all the world, so that Fröken Rud shall hear it, your son, and give him and his mother a house and land? Perhaps you'll meet her on the pier when she comes? Ha ha! Ah no! I know you, my

friend. You are, and always will be, a scoundrel."

And this man on the chair goes on talking so long that Erik suddenly starts up, seizes the glass, which is still standing beside him, and empties it greedily.

It is of no use! All that he has done is of no use!

Meanwhile, in another room, lay Fru Evje with her head buried in her pillows, praying. For how was this going to end? Alas, when a few days ago she thanked and praised God because the farm was at last saved for the family, she did not dream that Erik would no sooner have his hand on the property than he began to waste it. All this about Lars and Petra had come to her ears this evening, and it had fallen like the stroke of an axe upon her head. What would be the next thing? Within a year—— Ah no, she dared not think the thought out! Something must be done before it was too late, but what? As to reasoning with Erik, she knew a little about the use of that from experience. But what then? She weighed and tested every expedient, until she found herself gazing into one terrible one—namely, that of placing him under guardian-

ship. "Help me, O God, for Christ's sake!" she moaned, pressing her hands together.

Two or three days after this, when she was sitting in the office, trying to keep her thoughts upon an account-book, she started as Erik entered. What now?

He came in with an unwonted decision, with a light, firm tread, and seated himself at the other side of the writing-table. "Mother," he began, looking first at her and then beyond, out of the window, "if we two are to understand one another properly, there's a little account between us that I think we'd better settle at once. No, no, don't look so frightened! it's nothing very serious. But, honestly, why didn't you tell me that my son was dead?"

There was a pause, and then Fru Evje took off her spectacles, and laid them upon the account-book. "I was a little afraid of approaching those subjects," she began in a trembling voice. "I meant no harm by it, Erik!" They looked at one another with sad eyes.

"Well, our views on that matter are so different, mother, and I'm sure you and father acted in the way you thought right, when you prevented me from marrying Olina. But now

I think the time has come when my view of the matter and my conscience have something to say. What we do wrong can't be done quite over again; but to-day I've tried to right in some measure a wrong that all these years has tormented me more than anyone's had an idea of."

He sighed, and looked down at his hands that were clasped over his knee. In a little while Fru Evje asked him in a quivering voice what he had done. She was prepared for another blow on the head. And Erik told her that he had given Peter Tröen land and a house up the valley beside Bertil and Lars; and when Olina came out of prison, as she would soon do, she should live with her father, and be his sole heir. He would do what he could to regain her the esteem of her neighbours; and if she had a farm of her own, she would be sure to get married too.

"I don't mind saying, mother, that this was a bitter pill for me to swallow. In the first place I discovered that, in spite of everything, I was a big enough man not to like humbling myself before a simple labourer like Peter Tröen. It was hard to go to him. It was terrible to ask him about my son. It was still worse to ask after Olina. I felt as if I were

stopping and begging this man's pardon. When he told me that Olina was thinking of America, I almost cried out with relief, but became aware that this was another piece of cowardice. No, she shall come here! I tell you, mother, I'll look her in the face, I'll go to her one day and beg her forgiveness. Do you think it's nice giving away land belonging to the farm? No, indeed, it feels like amputating a finger each time; but it must be done, so that I can be happy with you, and glad to be the owner of all this. These days have been a severe test of character, and you don't know how glad I am that I've stood it. And now there's just one thing more. Will you come up with me to my room?"

As he rose, he passed his hand across his forehead, and looked almost radiantly at her. She was sitting with her hands before her face; and, when she mechanically raised her head, and slowly rose to her feet, everything seemed to be going round.

"What was I to do?" she stammered, taking hold of the back of a chair for support.

"I wanted you to come up with me to my room for a moment," he repeated. He was already leading the way, and she followed. She had to cling to the door for a second before she could go on.

He was already on the stairs; and when at last she entered his room, he was opening a trunk.

"Come here, mother!"

Fru Evje had to lean for support against the wall when she saw at the bottom of the trunk a whole row of bottles.

"When you have nothing to live for, mother, no God and no ideal, that is what you have recourse to. But now I don't need it any longer, so will you take the bottles into your keeping, and lock them up and keep the key; for I don't need them any more."

Fru Evje stood motionless, staring at the bottles. She was so confused with Erik's having again wasted some of the property that she could not quite understand this. She stood there, breathing hard and holding her hand to her head. "I don't understand a bit of it, Erik," she whispered at last. "Good God. I—I——" and suddenly she sank on to a chair, and burst into a violent fit of weeping.

It was some time before she had calmed down sufficiently to be able to get up; and then, quite mechanically, she fetched a basket from an attic, placed the bottles in it, and went downstairs.

Erik had been prepared for her taking all

this to heart. There was no help for it, and now the matter was brought to a conclusion. He remained standing at the open window, breathing with a sense of freedom. He could now hold up his head and look every one in the face. He felt as if, during the last few days, he had been laboriously, bit by bit, saving his soul.

BOOK II

Chapter I

Inga Rud lived very quietly at home with her parents this summer. Although she had now regained her peace of mind after the great crisis of the previous year, she was not what she had been at her best. As usual during the holidays, young men had come to the neighbourhood, and there had been dances and other festivities. Inga would accept the invitations too, but when she had helped to dress her younger sisters, it always ended in her finding an excuse for herself; and when they set off, she watched them go with a sad smile. There were boating expeditions out to the islands in the light nights, when bonfires were lighted and sounds of laughter and singing filled the air; and there were expeditions to the mountains and saeters, with baskets full of provisions and wine, which Inga had prepared; but some one had to be at home, and she always contrived that it should be she.

To anyone who expects nothing more from the future, bright memories become even brighter than before. The strange thing was that when Inga's thoughts went back to those never-to-be-forgotten years in the capital, when the whole world seemed like a ballroom full of music and admiring eyes, she would often think of Erik Evje too, whom in those days she could afford to make fun of. "I wonder," she thought, "whether I was not to blame for things turning out as they did with him."

She did not even notice herself that, while she sat plying her needle and looking back at her vanished happiness, she was filled at the same time with a growing sympathy for the man to whom she had then been so unmerciful.

After Herr Rein had gone away, she kept remembering his dark prophecy regarding Erik's labourers' holdings. She soon found out that she was the only person who knew anything about it. Herr Rein must have had other things to think about before he left, and Inga was glad of this in a way, though at the same time she felt a terrible responsibility. Should she warn Erik or not?

It was of no use for her to say to herself over and over again that Rein might have

made a mistake; she could not get away from the thought that Erik's plan about labourers' holdings might possibly end in a horrible catastrophe.

When Erik and his mother had called, she had really been at home, but she had not felt able to meet him for fear of hearing him talk about this fateful idea of his.

Reports of his shutting himself up in his room for days together to drink, also found their way to the doctor's house, and it was not exactly praise of him that she had to listen to on all sides; but she bowed her head and thought: "That is perhaps my fault again; perhaps I encouraged him, only to hide myself again."

It made a stir in the district when a report circulated that Erik had really begun to carry out his plan about labourers' holdings. The large landowners declared that the labourers in the district were spoiled enough already, and others were delighted at the thought of the sleepless nights that the avaricious Fru Evje must now be passing; but every one prophesied that the wealth of Evje would soon be a thing of the past.

Inga often felt a great desire to speak in defence of Erik. Even if it were true that he

was addicted to drinking, this, at any rate, was not wrong. She was silent, however, because Rein's prophecy was always sounding in her ears.

The fact that Erik, in spite of his good intentions, was perhaps doing something dreadful, surrounded him, in Inga's eyes, with a tragic light, and aroused in her a desire to help.

One evening, as she lay in bed, she folded her hands and prayed earnestly to God that Erik Evje might still be successful in this thing, because the thought was a fine one.

But when Rein came back from abroad next year, what then? Then perhaps Erik's act would prove to have been in vain, and the poor men have done the clearing and building all to no purpose.

There was no one who could prevent this except herself, and so one day she sat down and wrote a letter to Erik. But, when she was about to sign her name, she felt it quite impossible, for it reminded her too much of another letter she had once sent him, and which had probably made him unhappy for many years. Should she do it again?

It would really be better to go and speak to him herself; and in order to convince him that

she meant it for his good, she would—— Yes, what was it she would do?

Well, she need not make that clear to herself just now; but one Sunday evening, when she walked down the road towards Evje, it was almost as if she were going to offer herself to him.

She stopped often and hesitated, as if she would have liked to turn round, She met people she knew, but was scarcely aware of their greeting. When she had gone so far through the wood that she might at any moment see the first Evje hills, she had to sit down on a stone by the wayside to get up her courage. She had never had such a weary walk. When at last she had gone so far that she could see the big house up on the hill, with the sunlight flaming in its long row of windows towards the fjord, she stopped again, and began making holes in the sand with her parasol. She was going up there now, to kill what was perhaps Erik Evje's dearest possession.

And suddenly she turned round and hastened homewards. She could not do it; she would never be able to do it!

Chapter II

At last the day arrived when Bertil Sveen was relieved from service, and when, his own master, he set out from Evje with pickaxe, spade and axe upon his shoulder.

It was a calm, warm autumn day, with a yellow sky, and the fjord a deep blue. The meadows had not yet had time to grow green again after the hay, which was all in; and the corn stood tall and golden, bending before the breeze. The first yellow patches had appeared among the trees upon the hills. Bertil was in a strange mood. Up on the bluffs he stopped and looked down at the farm. There he had served for more than twenty years. From the time he was twelve years old and had begun as a goatherd, he had worked for others. But to-day—to-day was the beginning of something quite new.

He was passing the sawmills, and through the noise from the waterfall and the wheels, a voice shouted to him: "Come here and help

us, man!" But Bertil laughed, understanding it was only a joke, and really meant, "Congratulate you, Bertil!"

Above the fall, the river flows quite smoothly, and birch and fir are reflected in it. Here rises a perpendicular rock, making the quiet stream dark with shadow; there the sun scatters gold through the leaves upon the eddies, and farther on it is the blue sky that gazes up out of the water. Bertil passed through the gate into the hill pasture, and up on the next slope; he looked into a valley overgrown with alder and birch with here and there a fir-tree. The cattle had trodden paths in every direction. The yellow leaves hung motionless in the still air, cranberries were reddening on their mounds, and in front the fir-clad hill raised its curved ridge to the sun, the fir-trees along it standing like a row of church spires against the golden sky.

Bertil stopped in the middle of the piece of land that had been allotted to him, laid down his tools, hung his coat, waistcoat and hat upon a stump, spat upon his hands, and seized his axe. It flashed as it swung up into the sunlight, and suddenly the sound of sharp blows rang out over the silent forest. The hills answered back, irritated at being disturbed in

their sleep; and it was echoed again far in from the dark valley.

The chips flew about him; the great fir sighed, swayed a little as if it were about to faint, and suddenly the top described a long curve towards the earth. Bertil lopped the branches off the trunk, and dragged it a little to one side. It left a little clear spot with a tree-stump in the middle. This was Bertil and Ingeborg's first patch of cleared ground.

Soon after, the hills were scolding again. Then they grumbled a little, for it was alder and undergrowth that was being cut down with one blow. The pile of twigs and saplings grew unceasingly. The cleared patch increased in size; soon it was large enough for a cottage, and a little while after for a cow-shed too; but there were to be fields and meadows as well. The blows resounded, and the pile of branches became a little mountain.

Ding-dong went the bell down at Evje, ringing for dinner. Bertil stood erect and looked about him. He was to go home and get his meals at the farm to-day as usual, thanks to Erik Evje's offer. But before he went he would like to try whether that stone there could be moved; it was lying exactly where the celler under the cottage would be dug.

Bertil laid aside his axe, and, taking up a crowbar, drove it in under the stone. It moved a little, but slipped back again directly into its place, as much as to say, "I've lain here for a good many generations, and I'll do very well where I am." "Confound it!" said Bertil aloud, and struck the crowbar just under its back. Bother! then it must move after all; but in a little while it got the upper hand again, and slipped down into its bed once more. But now Bertil got angry, and drove the crowbar right in under the middle of the stone. Heave ho! His knees were bent, his back was like a bent bow, his face was contorted and his hands and arms quivered with the strain. Heave ho! Still more—and a little more—and there! The stone turned over and up on to the edge. In the earth-brown hole it left, worms and beetles crept out, and there were a number of fine roots that had twisted themselves against the stone.

This gave Bertil courage for more stones that were lying in places from which they had to be moved; and the perspiration ran down his face. The scent of cut juniper and juicy birch rose up in the heat. The sound of a bell approached, and a mare with her foal looked through the branches; the foal ven-

tured out to snuff at the heap of twigs, but galloped away as Bertil straightened his back. A goshawk hovered motionless, like a line, high up in the sky. The mare and the foal soon disappeared, and the only sounds to be heard were the distant roar of the waterfall, and Bertil's crowbar against the stone.

Ding, dong! It was the Evje bell ringing at three o'clock. Bertil wiped the perspiration from his forehead, and wondered that he should have forgotten dinner just that day. He would go home now. He took a fresh quid, and looked at the stumps standing out of the rich mould, and at the pile of branches which had grown into a small mountain. Ingeborg would have wood for boiling her coffee-kettle for some time to come, that was certain.

And he would be coming here to-morrow too, and clear as he had done to-day, and nobody would come and say: "You must do so and so at such and such a time. And oats are to be sown here, and potatoes planted there." No, it was he who was master here, and if he liked to sow something brand new, he could.

Suddenly the blows of the axe rang out again. Twilight began to make the valley deep with shadow, while the highest ridges still

glowed in the setting sun; but the blows of the axe still rang out of the darkness.

Late that evening two men came up along the bluffs by the river, each with a lantern in his hand. They had been sent out by Erik Evje to look for Bertil. "It's very likely he's fallen into the river in the darkness," said one of them. "Oh no," said the other. "It's much more likely that he's brought a tree down upon himself, or cut himself badly." But at the gate they stood still and listened, for the sound of chopping rang out from the darkness of the thick wood.

. . . . .

A few days later, Bertil was rowing across the fjord with Ingeborg in the stern of the boat. She was not allowed to help with the spare pair of oars; she was to sit in grandeur like the bailiff on his official expeditions. She had her dowry round her, things that she had got with her own savings. There was a chest of drawers, an old chest full of dresses and underclothing, and a large bundle of boots; for a careful servant ought to put by at least one pair of boots and two pairs of stockings a year, and Ingeborg had served for a great many years. She also had a bed and bedding, which there had not been room for to-day; and in the

bosom of her dress was a savings-bank book with a couple of hundred krones in it. She herself was a broad-shouldered, freckled woman of about forty, with slightly hollow cheeks, and hands that were coarse with the long years of service in other people's kitchens and cowsheds.

"How are you getting on?" asked Bertil, with a smile. She had said nothing for a long time.

"Oh, it's all so strange!" she said, looking back.

"Yes, it is!" he answered, pressing his lips together.

It was strange for her to be approaching the other shore; for, during the fifteen years of their engagement, she had never been to see him. Every summer they used to meet at the church in her parish, and in the winter they had exchanged a sort of letter to tell one another that everything between them should be as before. But many a time had she stood at the kitchen window and gazed across, and been sure that it was Bertil ploughing on the Evje hills. In the course of years, the shore over there had become a kind of dreamland, to which she turned her eyes whenever she was particularly tired or sad.

"I didn't think Evje Farm was so big!" she said, as they drew near to the shore; for from a distance, everything over there had seemed so small.

"I suppose you didn't think I was so big either," he said, smiling.

On the shore stood a horse from Evje, and when the load drew near to the house, Erik himself came out and bade her welcome.

A few days after there was a double wedding at Evje. The two couples drove to church, each in their separate basket-chaise, and after the wedding there was a festive gathering at the farm, to which all the farm-hands, tenants and neighbours were invited. At the table, which was laid out in the courtyard of the house, under the warm September sun, Erik himself made a speech, and all who heard it were of opinion that the priest himself could not have spoken so beautifully. Fru Evje had had to take a trip to town just then, but nobody minded that; and in the evening the young people were allowed to indulge in a dance. The only sad thing that happened was that one of the bridegrooms—namely, Lars Brovold, became so drunk, that his comrades had actually to carry him to bed.

After the wedding, Petra and Lars went to

live with his parents; and Bertil's wife took the cook's place at Evje until they could move into their own cottage.

As the autumn went on, the hills up the valley had a great deal to scold about. Bertil was chopping, Lars was chopping and had his father to help him, and old Peter Tröen was chopping and a son with him. Later on, when the ploughing began, the three neighbours up there had to take it in turns to help one another.

But a few weeks after the wedding, Lars heard something that quite dazed him. This was that Kristina up the valley had, after all, got engaged to Knut Rabben. And yet what did it matter to Lars, now that he was a married man and had other things than girls to think about? What indeed! But though he clenched his teeth and swore that he would put that nonsense out of his head, it came again and again, making him drop his axe or crowbar, and sit down in dejection.

"What's the matter with you, boy?" said his father, who was cutting and pulling up roots beside him.

"Oh, it's nothing worth mentioning," said Lars, setting to work again.

One day he heard that Knut and Kristina

were thinking of going to America, and that night Lars could not sleep; for if Kristina went so far away that he would never be able to see her again, he did not know what he should do.

He would have liked to injure Knut Rabben for life, but that was scarcely the wisest expedient. At last, when Lars had pondered the matter well for several days, it ended with his going to Erik Evje and asking for a piece of land for Knut too.

Knut was the son of one of the sawmill hands at Evje, and as there was plenty of room for several small holdings up the valley, and Lars begged so earnestly, Erik could do nothing but consent.

Lars was overjoyed, for now Kristina would at any rate be his neighbour.

One fine day when he was busy upon his land, he heard the sound of chopping just inside the wood. It was Knut beginning to clear the ground for himself and Kristina. A strange feeling suddenly came over Lars, and he stood listening to the sound. To think that some one else should clear the ground for the cottage in which Kristina was to be wife, and that it would never, never be he! It felt as if

each stroke of the axe fell upon something within him.

The strokes were echoed from the hills.

. . . . .

Bertil and Ingeborg had been married a month, and in that time she had grown pale and looked ill, and he was more taciturn than ever. At first she often went up to Newland with him, to consult with him as to how everything was to be done; but when she noticed that they had very different opinions about things, she began to say that he could do it all as he thought best.

No one could notice that they quarrelled and disagreed; but neither were they as newly-married people generally are. Perhaps they had waited too long for this marriage, and had grown to expect too much from one another.

The hardest thing for Ingeborg was that every time she thought Bertil was not what he ought to be, her mother's warning came into her mind. "If you take him, I shall 'turn' in my grave!" The old woman had wanted her to take a farmer, who was well-off; but Ingeborg wanted to be faithful to the man she loved and wait, and she had got him at last. But now she began to dream at night that her mother turned in her grave; and the oftener

she was disappointed in Bertil, the oftener this bad dream returned.

One bright moonlight evening, Bertil wandered up to his land again after supper. The logs had been driven up now, and were only waiting to be put up, and the cellar had been dug. It had been raining, and the leaves sparkled like so many stars in the wood, and from the black shadow of the valley sounded the quiet hum of the river.

Bertil walked round the logs with his thumbs in his waistcoat pockets, ruminating. The cottage would be sheltered enough here, and stood in the middle of the ground too; but there was something wrong with it that he had not noticed until the last few days—the fjord could not be seen from it.

A little later he was wading through the alder bushes up a hill. The raindrops from the leaves clung to his clothes, and began to reflect the moonbeams. When he reached the top, he put his hands in his trousers pockets and turned towards the broad, moonlit fjord. He could see the land on the other side too, now, where Ingeborg had lived for so many years. It was called Southland, and many a time had he turned his face towards it when he had had something to think about.

But the Ingeborg that had come here seemed different to the one over there.

"If the house had stood here," he thought, "I could have sat at the window and looked across. What a pity I didn't think of that before!"

He sighed and sat down upon a stone. If only the cellar had not been dug down there! That was many hard days' work.

As he went down again, he saw the view become less and less; and when Southland was quite gone, and the fjord too, he felt quite melancholy at the thought that it would be so dark down here.

It would be harder work with the crops up on the hill, it was true, and he had thought of Ingeborg, who was to help him to carry in the hay, when he had chosen the place down here. In his innermost heart there was a silent longing that he should not altogether lose the Ingeborg that was still on the other side of the fjord.

"If I had been younger," he thought, taking hold of a log, "I could have managed all the same."

A new cellar might be dug, but he could not possibly bother Herr Evje about horses to move the material.

"If I had been younger!" And just for fun, as it were, he took up the log, and tried its weight upon his shoulder. He managed it, but it bent him nearly double; and before he quite knew what he was doing, he had begun to move up the hill with this log through the wet leaves that sparkled in the bright moonlight. The hill almost took away his breath, but at last he reached the top and dropped the log. He then wiped his forehead and straightened his back; and while he regained his breath, he stood looking across at Southland all the time. The effort had made him feel almost as if he had saved some of what had been his comfort and hope for so many years.

During the next few days, all the farm-hands at Evje noticed that Bertil was unusually tired when he came home; but the pile of logs up there grew smaller and smaller, and up the hill there went a black path with deep marks of feet that had trodden hard. At last nothing was left down below but a wide hole: the material was moved.

"Too much water got into the cellar on the old place," said Bertil to those who wondered; but he seemed crooked and bent from this time, and generally walked with his hand on his back.

Chapter III

One Sunday afternoon large numbers of people gathered about the steamer pier, for to-day Olina Tröen was expected home from prison. As the boat ploughed its way into the bay, however, and whistled, people began to retreat up the grass slopes; and when curiosity drove some children right up to the gangway, a sensible man came and sent them away. Within the memory of man, nothing so horrible had happened in these parts as Olina's murder of her child, so she was not a person for children to come near.

The boat lay to at the pier, and people began to go ashore. "Where is she?" it was whispered in the groups on the grass. "That's her with the basket." "Oh, my goodness!" "She wore a handkerchief on her head when she went away, but now she's got a hat!" said a voice in the crowd. "See what it is to have been to town!"

Little, grey-bearded Peter Tröen came down with a wheelbarrow. No one returned his greeting as he passed, but all followed him with their eyes. One woman was left standing down upon the bridge, and though she looked with a glance of recognition at several, they all hurried past her. At last she caught sight of her father, and now they saw her smile, but immediately afterwards put her handkerchief to her eyes. "Poor man! To be her father!" said a woman up on the slope. "It's a good thing her mother's in her grave." But even when her father had taken her basket and set off, Olina still stood wiping her eyes. She did not seem to know how to come any nearer to those people who were staring so.

Suddenly a carriage from Evje turned in in front of the boathouses, and Erik himself got out, and began to walk down the beach. "Good-day, Olina!" he called from a distance, so that every one must hear it distinctly. They did indeed stare open-mouthed when Herr Evje shook hands with her and was as polite to her as if she were a fine lady, and still more when her things were put into the Evje carriage, and she took her place beside Erik. She too looked quite confused. As they drove through the crowd, Erik raised his hat with

a curious smile, and the people could not but return his greeting; and as Peter Tröen trudged along behind with his empty wheelbarrow, several of them spoke a few words to him too.

The road wound like a thread along the autumn-grey fjord, while here and there lay heaps of withered leaves, sometimes trodden into the mire. When the carriage could no longer be seen from the pier, the horse was allowed to walk.

Erik was in a strange mood. He had been dreading this meeting, but when he met her, it was as if she were almost a stranger. Time, the prison atmosphere, and her troubles had done their work, and the woman who sat there was certainly not the pure, maidenly being his conscience had made her into. This, however, was only a relief. "I don't love her any longer," he thought with a sense of freedom; "and perhaps she has never reproached me. I may have been imagining an exaggerated amount of blame in the matter." Perhaps she had not been so very unhappy in prison either.

"It's a long time since we met last, Olina, isn't it?"

The woman turned her coarse-featured face

towards him, and tried to laugh. "Yes," she answered, "it is a long time."

She had picked up a terrible town accent, and added to that there was the miserable hat and the clumsy attempt at finery. She pressed her lips together, too, when she smiled, so that her nose came right down to her mouth. She began to talk volubly of how nice it was to come home to her father again; and, without thanking Erik, she began in a practical manner to wonder how long it would be before they could keep a horse upon the little farm he had given her.

When they got into the wood, and no one was in sight, Erik turned to her with a melancholy smile, and said: "Are you angry with me, Olina?"

At first she looked at him in astonishment, and then gave him the side-glance that had always bewitched him so, and that to-day was like a last message from something that he was never to see again.

"Oh no!" she answered at last, without turning to him, and then blushing suddenly at some thought that had come into her mind. Erik kept down a rising emotion. It was this question and this answer that had so often robbed him of sleep.

In a little while she added quietly, as if to herself: "It's so long ago now."

Long ago! He would like to tell her—but no, no! She might answer that she was still unmarried, and he too; and that? Never! He could see with his mind's eye a woman with soft hands and beautiful dark eyebrows. What he had now done for Olina would have to be sufficient.

When Erik had set her down at her father's little cottage, he felt that his account with this cottager's daughter was now settled. But, on his way homewards, he sat with bent head. That these painful reminiscences of his youth would not be likely to worry him any more, was a good enough thing; but, with the dropping of this woman out of his account, he seemed to be burying a large part of his own youth.

"And what purpose has it all served?" he thought sadly, as he drove up the avenue at Evje. It almost seemed to him as if his own conscience had befooled him.

Chapter IV

It was after this that Fru Evje began to regain her former good spirits; for something happened of which she had lost all hope. Erik began to take his duties as master seriously; and everything went more smoothly at Evje now than they had done for many years, because there was once more a man to hold the reins.

What she found so difficult to accustom herself to was the thought that everything did not now rest upon her; and many a time when she hurried out with an order, she received the answer that Herr Evje had told them that the day before, and she could only laugh to herself and go in again.

Something of the gentleness that results from a more chastened view of one's own troubles, began to come over Fru Evje. She understood that those unhappy days in the summer had been a trial sent by God; and

she therefore tried to win back in Christian humility what she had lost in land.

Erik had really become active. It seemed as if he only now, when the matters of Olina and the labourers' holdings had been settled, felt the right to take full possession of his own property. He was young, he had grown strong again, and his energy had to find a vent. He soon saw that, notwithstanding his mother's capability, much at Evje had deteriorated during the last few years. The large farm was not what it had been, the planing and saw mills had become antiquated, and the flour-mill was only a parish mill. Something quite different could be made out of all this, and he already was beginning to start extensions.

It was not long before he was so thoroughly acquainted with all the details that he could catch the old forest foreman in little falsifications. Fru Evje heard from her sitting-room that there was a disturbance in the office, and before long Erik came rushing in, quite red in the face. "That confounded scoundrel shall be sacked!" he swore. "Erik, Erik, don't do anything you'll regret!" "Regret! He's been all-powerful up to now, the old fox; but it's not going on any longer!" "Well, Erik,

there's no one who understands his business as he does, and you're not able to take his place yet." Erik at last allowed himself to be appeased, but his suspicions had been aroused. Then he discovered that the labourers, whose work did not lie within the field of his mother's supervision, used to spend the time in talking; so he began to take them by surprise. The big business occupied not only all his thoughts, but it began to transform him for its own use.

When the work of the week was over, and Fru Evje, on Sunday morning, put on her things to go to church, Erik would take a walk up the valley to the labourers' colony, which was now always called Newland.

It was a great event when he saw smoke rising from one of the cottages there for the first time. The following Sunday there was one more, and later on yet another. The last was from Olina's hearth, and he stood and looked at that for some time. This project of his, that had once been a distant dream, was at last actually realised. "People may say what they like about me," thought Erik; "but no one else has done that before." There was so much to think about in this matter that he had to sit down upon a stone and light his pipe. As he sat looking out upon this little

world that he had created, it was not really the cottages, the land, or their inhabitants that he was thinking about. Every great undertaking that has cost us labour gradually assumes an appearance to us that it has not to other people. To Erik, Newland was a collection of precious memories of himself. It reminded him of the evil days he had gone through, both in the capital and here, but also of that through which he had laboriously toiled up again. The idea had come to him like a boat to a shipwrecked man. Newland also reminded him of troubles that had been overcome, of sore recollections that had been healed, of debts of conscience that had at last been paid. The people who lived there were the embodiment of something beautiful in himself. His youthful ideas had seemed for a time as though they would be wrecked, but they had come safely to shore here, and the consciousness of this was always with him like a great and good conscience.

After being, for six days, the practical man, who reckons out carefully what will pay, Erik found the Sunday walk to Newland to be a kind of church-going, as up there he was sure to find a cleaner and more beautiful edition of himself.

Erik Evje had become a capable man, who

had begun to be respected. If he was to be here at all, he would like to show people that Evje was not going to deteriorate under his rule.

One day just before Christmas, he came home to dinner in great excitement over the way the distillery, in which he and his mother had a number of shares, was being managed. A shameful want of cleanliness was reported there, and anarchy reigned among the functionaries and work-people; and now if they weren't going to elect a school-teacher on the board! He was the man to put things right.

"Well, I suppose it's your own fault," said his mother a little bitterly.

"What's that nonsense?"

"Well, you know you'd rather the whole distillery went to ruin," she went on. "And it soon will now, and then we may whistle for the thousands that your father put into it."

"You can't be serious, mother! Do I want it to go to ruin?"

"Yes, I suppose you do."

"When have I said so?"

"Haven't you been asked to become a member of the board—not once, but ten times?"

Erik looked down, and did not answer; but later in the day, after he had been walking ex-

citedly up and down the office, he came in to her and said that he had decided to allow himself to be elected after all. He saw the matter in a different light now. And he began to walk about the room, and explain to her how he had thought the irregularities might be corrected. "What are you smiling at?" he said, stopping suddenly.

"You should have seen how like you were to your father," his mother answered.

Erik felt a slight shock. Indeed, had he really begun to——? And for a moment he seemed to hear a well-known voice saying, with a scornful laugh: "Oh yes, already you're a forest-plunderer, and now you'll soon be a spirit-distiller. The next thing will be the Order of St. Olaf."

"Nonsense!" thought Erik; and it was really a comfort to be able to think that his father would never have planned Newland.

A week later he was sitting in a sleigh one frosty moonlight evening, driving homewards. The fjord looked black against the white shore, and the silver harness-bells rang clearly through the snow-laden forest. Erik was now a director, and he was wearing his father's fur coat; but it seemed to him as if the bells kept up an incessant cry of "Spirit-distiller!

Spirit-distiller!" He got no peace until he had promised himself that the miller should also have house and land on Newland.

There were some Sundays now when he had not time to go up to Newland, but sat over his papers in the office. He was risking large sums of money upon his extensions, and the thing was to get it to work. He still felt inexperienced in many things, and it often seemed to be getting beyond him; but he set his teeth and went at it again, for he was determined that he would get it to go. One transaction followed the other; he made enemies, against whom it was important to make the right moves, and in his zeal he was often hard-handed enough; but the farther he felt himself drifting away from the pure, unselfish ideas that belonged to Newland, the dearer and higher did that spot become in his mind. It was a comfort to turn to it when he had done a bad action; it soon stood out as a far-off state of innocence, to which he still hoped at some time to return; it became a little dreamland, lying on a height, where the sun never went down.

The winter days followed one another with snow-storms of sharp frost. He had looked forward to a little social intercourse at Christ-

mas-time; but the day before Christmas Eve something happened that altered the case.

He was standing on the pier waiting for his mother, who was coming by the boat from a neighbouring parish, when the doctor's sleigh drove up in front of the boathouses, and a young lady in light grey furs struggled out of it. It was Inga Rud.

Erik laid down the reins, and walked in his heavy fur coat towards her, and shook hands. "Are you going away in this Siberian cold?" he said, waiting anxiously for her answer.

She looked away as she replied: "Yes, I'm going to stay with my sister in Kristiania."

"Really? And you mean to leave us all alone here at Christmas! Shall you be away long?"

"Probably until the spring," she answered.

There was nothing to be said to that. The frost-vapour drifted in from the leaden-coloured fjord, and wound itself about her well-wrapped-up figure; but her face was rosy and fresh under her fur hat, and her eyebrows were more beautiful than ever.

"Good-bye!" she said as the steamer approached, and she prepared to go on board.

"Good-bye! And a happy Christmas!"

A melancholy little smile flashed across her face. What could it mean?

As he sat by his mother's side in the sleigh, driving along the fjord, he watched the ship that was carrying her away, until the grey frost fog closed over it. It had at any rate been a pleasure to know she was so near; and now the winter would feel darker and colder than before.

Christmas came, and there were festivities in the parish; but Erik stayed at home.

It was long since he had spent a winter in the country, and he began to feel the want of some one to talk to, who shared his opinions. As he went from window to window, he would feel as if he were snowed up, far, far away from the world. For weeks together the window-panes would be thick with ice, and the frost would pour in like white smoke whenever the door was opened; and there was something depressing about the stiffened landscape that lay there day after day as hopelessly as if under a winding-sheet. After a couple of hours' daylight, the grey twilight would come once more; and when Erik saw the yellow lights appearing in the windows of the farms on the other side of the fjord, they seemed to

him like signals from people in distress, whom he was unable to help.

It was a change for him to go with the forest manager on ski up to the timber-felling, through white forest, across heaths and frozen lakes, where only the occasional track of a hare was seen. There he would sit in the snow and eat the food he had taken with him, and watch the piles of timber turning into mountains of snow, the men's beards into icicles, and the horses' coats into frost-brushes; and then towards evening they would skim down again over the hills on their ski, brushing clouds of snow from the bushes and branches, and with the cold air nipping their noses and making them burn.

At last the sun was seen again, and the weeks passed more quickly as the days grew into spring. The fjord became lighter in colour, and the hot sun began to bring out the smell of the sea and seaweed. When at last May—with its green woods and cuckoo-calls and busy farm-labourers on the Evje hills—had come, great changes had taken place up at the waterfall. The sawmills and planing-mills were now new, modern factory buildings; and the flour-mill had been pulled down to make room for a larger one.

Up at Newland, where the snow lay longer than down by the sea, a little of the spring farming work had at last been done, too, after a fashion. Knut Rabben and Kristina had moved up, and the miller was building; so now there would soon be five little farms standing upon ground that a year before had only been uncleared land.

At last, one Sunday, Erik found time to go up there again. He was strangely touched when he saw the little patches of fields on the hillsides, with the crops beginning to show green; but it seemed to him as if what was sown was not corn, but ideas. The young shoots made him think of little children stretching their arms up towards the sun.

"God grant it may be a good year now!" thought Erik, as he rose with a feeling almost of sadness at having to leave the place again.

But when he looked down from the cliffs upon his own wide fields, where the corn was much more forward, he stood still once more in a strange emotion. It almost seemed as if those patches of land in Newland had voluntarily made themselves so small, so that his own might be all the larger. They lay in there in the shade, so that his could lie in the sun. Indeed it almost seemed as if the people in

Newland lived their life just there, so that he could feel happy here in the sun.

"And now she will soon be coming home again, I suppose, and then?"

When he reached home, a strange carriole was standing in the yard. A maid came out of the kitchen door, and he asked her whether there were visitors.

"I think it's the district engineer," she answered.

"Oh, has he come back?" thought Erik, as he stamped the earth off his boots upon the fir branches lying at the foot of the steps.

Chapter V

Herr Rein was sitting talking to Fru Evje in the large corner room; but, when Erik entered he rose quickly and adjusted his glasses. "Good heavens!" he thought; "is this Erik Evje?" This strong, sunburnt fellow was a very different being from that poor pale thing on the steamer last year.

"How do you do, Rein? And welcome back!" said Erik, going forward quickly. "Have you had a good time while you were away? But there's nothing left of your hand! Hadn't you anything to eat where you've been?"

"Well, you've got a regular farmer's fist, to make up for it," said Rein, shaking his thin fingers after the pressure Erik had given them.

Erik smiled. "Yes," he said; "that's what comes of being a farmer."

"But now I shall be in the way," said Fru Evje, making a movement to go.

"Oh dear, no!" exclaimed the engineer, turning to her. "I hope Evje and I can have a chat in the office."

"Is it as serious as that?" asked Erik. "But how is your wife? Is she tired after her journey?"

"Oh, thank you," Rein replied, a little confused, for Erik's friendliness seemed almost inopportune. "Can we go into the office, then?"

"Why, certainly!" replied Erik, laughing, as he led the way.

They entered a large room with leather sofas and chairs and a writing-table in the middle of the floor. The high windows, like those in the sitting-rooms, were almost hidden by plants in pots. Erik motioned his companion to an arm-chair, and seated himself at the table, facing him. "Well?" he said, with an expectant smile.

Rein crossed one of his long legs over the other, and taking off his glasses began to play with them. "Well," he said; "the fact is, this is an unpleasant errand for me, my dear Evje."

"Then perhaps we'd better help ourselves to a cigar," Erik suggested, handing him a box; but Rein declined. His forehead wrinkled

nervously, and he kept on fingering his glasses. "What nails that man is furnished with, to be sure!" thought Erik, remembering at the same moment that Mogstad also had just such nails.

"I've been very reluctant to come on this errand," Rein went on, with his eyes on his glasses. "But on the other hand you will be just the person to understand that I feel it my duty to speak before it's too late."

"Speak away, then!" said Erik impatiently.

"Your idea about the labourers' holdings is admirable and good, and therefore it's a very great pity that you'll have to give it up."

Erik grasped the arms of his chair and opened his mouth in astonishment, then half closed his eyes and burst out laughing. "Give it up?"

"Yes," said Rein, looking at him at last.

"But, man alive, don't you know that there are several families living up there already?"

"That's just the pity, for you'll have to ask them to move out of it again."

There was a short pause, but Erik still laughed. "What shall I have to do, do you say?" At this moment he resembled his father again, when he threw himself back in his chair.

Rein put on his glasses and looked towards the window as if at the thing he was talking about.

"There's a quagmire up there, and there may be a landslip at any moment. An autumn or spring flood will be enough to carry the whole hillside down into the river. The danger is doubled now that the settlers have cleared away the wood that has held the slope together up to the present; and it is absolutely unjustifiable to let people go on living there."

There was another pause, while Erik continued to look at Rein; and then at last he said in a toneless voice: "What are you talking about, man?"

"The pity is that I wasn't at home when you started this affair."

Erik rose from his seat and went to the window, where he appeared to be looking out. They were both silent for a time, and in the silence the ticking of a clock could be heard. But Erik was thinking of what the other had said. Landslips were not uncommon things; and now he imagined to himself the little cottages in Newland slipping down, carried down by sand and clay, and swallowed up in an abyss, leaving the naked rock behind them gaping like an open wound.

At last he turned. "How can you be sure of this?" he asked.

Rein told of his having to do with the laying out of the new railway, and how it was the quagmire up there that had necessitated the bringing of the line round the other side of the hill.

"Does any one else know of this? For I've never heard a word of it before."

"The officer who helped me would be able to certify it, and so would my assistants. I can give you their addresses, if you like."

Erik began to walk slowly up and down the room, the sunlight as it filtered in through the leaves of the plants in the window every now and then catching his fair hair and pointed beard.

"Well," he said at last, his head bent, "this is a bad lookout for me."

"And still worse for those poor things up there, who have had all their toil for nothing."

"But, dear me, it can't be quite so bad as you make out, Rein."

"It's worse, if anything. There are already suspicious indications in the bed of the river farther up. I was up there yesterday. I wanted to be sure before I spoke to you."

Erik felt a cold shiver run down his back,

and his walk grew more agitated and intermittent. He passed his hand across his forehead, looked towards the window, and finally at Rein.

"But, confound it, there must be some means of preventing a catastrophe!"

Rein shook his head.

"A bulwark of piles, for instance?" Erik looked at him anxiously. But Rein could not help smiling. "Whether it were of piles or matches," he said; "it would be equally worthless."

His absolute certainty began to irritate the master of Evje. Rein seemed so inexorable. It was really as if he had come with an ultimatum.

Rein now rose, evidently relieved at having got through his difficult task.

"Well, well," said Erik, shaking hands with him; "I must think the matter over."

"It will make no difference, however much you think it over, Evje; and I sincerely hope that you won't put off doing what ought to be done. It's a question of many human lives."

Erik began to pace up and down again. "But, confound it, I must have time to think it over before I go and turn those people off the land I've just given them, for I've no

other to let them have. But that's what you want, is it? They're to leave the place, are they? Pull down their houses, and leave the little fields they've dug, which are now growing green; reduce themselves to penury again, man, wife and children? That's what you want, is it?"

Rein sighed. "It's a pity, but——"

"But?" Erik repeated, looking at him.

"Well, at any rate it's not my fault that there's a quagmire on the Evje hills."

Erik felt a little repulsed, and began to pace up and down again. "No," he said; "and goodness knows it isn't mine either. I certainly meant well, though it raised a great outcry among the rich farmers here. They declared I was infecting the whole district with socialism; and to this day those poor labourers' holdings are a vexation to them all."

Rein had no wish to enter into this subject, and therefore moved towards the door. "Well," he said, "that's what I came for, and I've done what *I* can. Good-morning." Erik did not accompany him to the door, but continued to walk up and down.

In the meantime, Fru Evje had been occupied with her own affairs; but some time after she had heard Rein drive away, she had oc-

casion to pass through the sitting-rooms, and went into the office. Erik was then sitting with his head in his hands.

"Well?" she asked, standing still and looking at him.

He made no answer at first, but when she had got it all out of him, she burst into a loud laugh. "Oh, that's too funny!" she cried. "That really is good!"

Erik rose with an expectant look. "Do you know anything about this then, mother?" he said.

"Certainly I do," she said, sitting down.

"Have you heard that there is a quagmire up there?"

"Not until we people who lived along the shore were to have the railway on our side; but then it suddenly became so full of quagmires that it was quite impossible for us to have the railway. Oh, that Rein! He'll lend himself to anything!"

Erik was thoughtful for a little while, and then said: "Are you certain of this, mother?"

"Oh yes, Erik; I wasn't born yesterday."

Erik kept walking slowly from one window to the other, and then turned and went up to his mother, and, placing his hands on her shoulders, said: "Are you perfectly sure,

mother? Is it all a made-up story that the Newland people are in danger?"

Fru Evje began to talk volubly about all the intriguing that had gone on among the inhabitants of the valley in order to get the railway over on their side. Erik didn't know yet what people could be like!

When she was gone, Erik remained standing in the middle of the room with his eyes on the floor. Of course his mother was right! Of course!

He wandered about for some time longer, both out of doors and in, but at last sat down to work to get rid of his uncomfortable thoughts. But all the time a small voice within him kept on saying: "Suppose—nevertheless——"

Erik was not happy during the next few days. His mother's assurances had quieted him, but not enough.

There are some men who cannot think clearly unless they have a cigar in their mouth. When that little thing no longer smokes, their thoughts, too, come to a standstill. It was thus now with Erik Evje. The matter of the labourers' holdings had been a necessity to his mind. Of late he had worked steadily and well, without giving much attention to it; but

now, when it threatened to come to a standstill, it was another matter. In the middle of a letter to the Local Government Board, his pen ceased to move. "Suppose—nevertheless—— What then?" Later on it was necessary to write about a fresh purchase of a farm for the sake of its forest. The pen was arrested again in the face of this same catastrophe. When he was among the men at the sawmill, it came again—"Suppose—nevertheless——" And at night he lay awake, imagining he saw the Newland settlers moving away, Newland lying deserted, an unsuccessful attempt, and he himself left with his business, his calculations and lawsuits, forest devastation and distillery. If only he could be quite sure that his mother was right! He would have liked to go and consult some one, but whom? And the Newland people must not be alarmed either.

One day, when he was sitting in his office, there was a knock at the door, and Töger, the little shoemaker, came limping in, took off his cap, and wished Erik good-morning with a beaming face. Erik asked him to sit down, and he swung round on his short leg on to the edge of a chair, where he sat twisting his cap in his hands.

"Well?" questioned Erik, turning towards him.

It was not very easy for the little shoemaker to say what he had come to say, and he smiled in an embarrassed way at his cap. It put Erik in a good humour to look at him. His face, like that of so many shoemakers, shone with a bluish dampness. His head was round and small, and covered with thick black hair, and his thin shoemaker's hands were dyed with leather and blacking. He was a merry fellow, the only thing that made him angry being to be made fun of by the girls for his deformity.

"I wanted," he began at last, "to ask you whether you would have any objection to my—to my going up to live with Peter Tröen."

"Indeed, Töger? I fancy it's with Olina you mean, isn't it?"

"Well, perhaps it is, he he!" said the shoemaker, turning red and looking down at his cap.

Erik got up and began to walk up and down. He had hoped that Olina would marry, and now it was to be with this man. He had really nothing to say in this matter; it was only out of courtesy that he was asked.

"But suppose they have to move!" he sud-

denly thought. "Will he still have her?. I ought to tell him of the risk he runs!" But once he had told this man, he might as well go up and tell them all, and then?

Erik continued to pace up and down; but at last stopped in front of the shoemaker and held out his hand. "Good luck to you, then!" he said.

"Oh, thank you, thank you!"

"But you're to promise me one thing. You've been a little too fond of strong drink, and now you must turn teetotaller."

This the shoemaker promised, thanking again. When the delighted little man was gone, Erik remained standing with one hand leaning upon the writing-table.

He was now responsible for another human life up there.

Chapter VI

The Government engineer, Rein, was not popular in the parish. Some people thought him too obstinate, others too rough; and he had had more than one collision both with the authorities and with private persons. Wits had often said that they would rather have to do with a scoundrel than with such a monomaniac in the matter of rectitude as that Rein.

It was true, indeed, that he took his opinions far too seriously. In politics, he would take even little things so much to heart, that he would lie awake half the night worrying over them. Then, when he had given vent to his indignation in a newspaper article, it often happened that his manuscript was returned because it was far too one-sided, far too violent; and the more righteous indignation he had to swallow in this way, the more gloomy and solitary he began to feel, and this was noticeable even with his wife.

Fru Rein lived, as so many have done, upon bright, happy memories of her father. He had been a man out of the common—priest, schoolmaster and hymn-writer—an idealist and a fighter. He had suddenly resigned his living, and it was whispered that there were affairs with women. His school had to be given up directly after for lack of pupils; but Fru Rein never doubted that her father was the victim of persecution, and this shed a still more golden light upon his memory. This memory was her guide whenever she had to make up her mind about anything; and more than once, when defending some case against her husband, she felt, half unconsciously, that it was really her father whom she was defending.

Thus there were often scenes in the engineer's house. She considered him far too sceptical, and he thought her far too simple, and though they were often quite happy for a long time, yet every fresh disagreement served to widen the rift between them. Fru Rein often sat and pondered the matter, but it only became a new reason for living over again the bright days of her youth in the parsonage, where she could see her white-haired father moving about the garden, tending his flowers.

From the day when Rein had first mentioned the quagmire on the Evje hills, Fru Rein had instinctively advised him to do nothing at all in the matter. Erik's idea seemed to her so beautiful, that it reminded her forcibly of her father. When they returned from abroad, and Rein began to talk seriously of interfering, she opposed him obstinately. Rein despised himself a little for actually taking this into consideration; but one day they had a little dispute about the religious instruction for their children, and at last she exclaimed: "I wonder what you really do believe in, Ingvald!"

"What I believe in?"

"Yes. It can't be very much, for you must needs even try to upset a thing like those poor labourers' holdings at Evje." And he, with the anger that only conjugal scenes can rouse in a man, replied: "To put an end to this, Sara, I'll go to Evje this very minute."

And he did it. To Erik, therefore, he was a little colder than he need have been, because he was also thinking of his wife.

Rein's white house stood in the shelter of a fir-clad promontory. The bay curved in right up to his garden fence, and beyond the outhouses, ducks and geese swam about in a large

pond. Fru Rein was fond of all kinds of animals, but especially birds.

The atmosphere of the house was a little sultry during the first few days after Rein's visit to Evje, and the husband and wife exchanged only the most necessary words at table. More than once Rein thought to himself: "Goodness me, why does she meddle with things that she can't possibly understand?"

One evening, when he had gone up to his workroom after supper to smoke and read the paper, he suddenly heard her light step upon the stairs, and she entered the room. She was a woman of about thirty, tall and pretty, with a bright child's face beneath a wealth of fair hair, and blue, expressive eyes. On this occasion she was wearing a light dress, which made her look quite young. She moved swiftly and lightly across the floor, and sat down in a chair on the other side of his writing-table.

"Ah, Ingvald," she began, "this is really so sad."

He cleared his throat, and pressed down the ash in the bowl of his pipe with his finger. "M-yes?" he said, not quite knowing what he should say.

"Sometimes it seems as if there were such a tremendous distance between you and me."

"Oh no; does it really?"

"To think that you can go and do things that—that you know will hurt me so."

"Hm."

"How did he take it?" she asked suddenly, turning to him.

Rein got up from the sofa on which he had been half lying, and slowly crossed the room. "Are we going to have still more of this?" he thought, as he stood looking out of the window.

"Won't you answer me now, either?"

"Now look here, Sara—Erik Evje's a grown man after all. It'll be worst for the labourers; but I think even they will thank me."

"And suppose you're mistaken, Ingvald? Do you know all you're pulling to pieces?"

"Do you think I should interfere in anything like this without being sure?"

Fru Rein leaned against the writing-table and sighed as she looked towards the window.

"It seems such a pity, Ingvald, that you should always be the one to set yourself against anything new and good. And you've said that this time it was no part of your official duties either."

Ingvald Rein laughed a strange laugh. "Do you say that, Sara—you who are such an idealist? Do you think we're to let the world

go its own way when it's no part of our official duty?"

Fru Rein rose quickly, offended at her husband's having got the better of her.

"I think," she said, her voice trembling, "it would be nice for once to see you doing a good action."

"Isn't it a good action to save one's fellow-creatures?"

She stood leaning against the table and looking straight before her. "I've thought and thought about this, Ingvald, and I'm afraid it's Erik Evje's idea you want to pick holes in."

"Oh, indeed!" said Rein, involuntarily bending his head to see her better.

"And you can't imagine how it hurts me. Every day we see selfishness, deceit, falsehood, hypocrisy and all kinds of evil around us; and then, for once, it happens that a man shows a little ideality. He not only preaches about the poor, but he actually gives something that's of use. He holds a thing up before the eyes of every one, and takes the lead himself. Nothing so fine and great has been done in the district within the memory of man. And then, Ingvald, you come forward and kick the whole thing down. Oh, I can't bear to think of it."

And she suddenly hid her face in her hands and groaned.

"Now, Sara, let's have done with these hysterics!"

"Yes, yes; I won't mention it again."

She bent her head and compressed her lips. Rein returned to the sofa, and sat pulling his beard. He was uncomfortable. As usual he was looked upon as an evil-minded being, because he had asserted something that he was quite sure about.

"It's not easy for the rest of us, Ingvald, to live upon only mathematics and measurements. You think Christianity and philanthropy are all humbug."

"When have I said that, Sara?"

"You showed it so often when you used to make fun of father."

"But, Sara, that's simply untrue!" cried Rein, rising once more.

She turned towards him, and threw back her head to look at him. "Will you deny that now, Ingvald?"

"Your father was a good enough man; but when it's a question of judging about the quagmire on the Evje hills, I rely more upon myself."

"You rely upon yourself in everything. Is

there anything, I wonder, that you don't understand. Why, you understand the bringing-up of children, too, better than even their mother."

"I never said that I understand so much. But I won't have my children brought up on lies, even if their grandfather was a priest."

"Yes, there you go, Ingvald. But can't you leave father alone in his grave?"

And with this the quagmire on the Evje hills had gone over into their own world, so that they could continue to wound one another while believing that it was still the labourers' holdings they were talking about.

They did not hear the sound of carriole wheels in the yard, and they were standing one on either side of the writing-table, talking as angrily as only married people who love one another can, and Fru Rein was on the point of bursting into tears, when some one knocked at the door. Rein thought it was the maid, and called out angrily, "Come in!" The door opened, and Erik Evje came in.

"Good-evening!" he said, shaking hands with them both. "Excuse my making such a late call." But here he stopped short and looked at them both. Fru Rein was incapable of anything further, and after passing her

hand across her forehead, and attempting to say something, she hastily crossed the room and went out. The men stood for a moment looking at the door as it closed upon her, and then looked at one another.

"Sit down," said Rein, pointing to an arm-chair, and seating himself at the writing-table.

Chapter VII

Evje sat down with his light overcoat on, and resting his hat on his knee, sat for a moment looking at it. He saw that he had come at an inopportune moment, but he could not well go again immediately. Rein, who was excited, forced himself to appear calm, although he could not imagine what Evje had come for.

To his surprise, Erik began to talk quite quietly about other things. They had once been school-fellows. How quickly the time passed. Erik thought it seemed such a long time ago. Rein looked at him a little uncertainly, and said something about its being probably twenty years since that time.

"And at that time neither of us dreamt that our ways would lie in such different directions," Erik went on, with an attempt at a smile.

Rein looked towards the window, where the

top of a birch-tree could be seen waving in the wind. "No, indeed," he said. "Both ways and views are different."

"But I'd gladly have changed with you, Rein, for yours was a wise choice. You gained happiness."

Rein still looked towards the window. "Oh, we needn't talk of happiness, Evje," he said. "If I were the owner of the most beautiful part of the district, I don't think I should complain."

"Wouldn't you? And I'm thinking of not owning it any longer."

Rein nearly rose in his astonishment. "What!" he said.

Erik nodded down at his hat. Yes, he meant what he said.

"But surely you don't mean to sell it?"

Erik threw his hat upon the floor, and rested his elbows upon his knees. "Oh, I've not made up my mind yet as to the manner of getting rid of it. The main thing is that I must probably leave it all. If only there were somewhere to go."

This all sounded so impossible to Rein, that he did not know what to say; but now Erik rose, and, looking at him, went on: "That's to say it all depends really upon you."

There was a pause, and Rein looked astonished. "Upon me?" he said.

"Yes."

"That sounds strange."

"That's what I've come for. To tell the truth, I've not been comfortable since you came to me the other day." Erik passed his hand across his forehead, and his expression was one of pain. "Many people would say that I might safely laugh at your warning, but all the same it's lain like a worm, gnawing and gnawing inside me, so that I haven't even been able to sleep properly. So I had to come up and tell you that if I'm compelled to go to Newland and ask those people to move away, I shall feel it impossible to go on living at Evje."

"There!" thought Rein, "I wasn't mistaken," and the irritation from his encounter with his wife blazed up again. There seemed moreover such a falseness about Erik's words, in spite of the sincerity in his voice, that he did not know whether to be distressed or amused.

"But my dear fellow!" he said, leaning back in his chair. "The quagmire doesn't threaten your house at all."

"You misunderstand me, Rein. I never for

a moment thought of my own house. But you must excuse my coming to ask you once more: Is it absolutely necessary for the Newland people to move?"

Rein took up a pencil and began mechanically to draw upon the blotting-paper before him. "I've nothing new to say upon that subject, Erik."

Erik bent his head. "I suppose not," he said, with a sigh, and seemed about to go, but hesitated, and turned to Rein again. "Perhaps you've never thought very much, Rein, what this means for me?"

"No," Rein answered, looking up from his drawing. "I've thought more especially what it means for the people living up there."

Erik put his hands behind his back, and slowly crossed the room. There was a pause. When he came back, he stopped and passed his hand across his forehead. "We were speaking of happiness, Rein," he said. "There comes a time when even the hope in one's breast is worn out. The disappointments and defeats have been so numerous, that if this should be a failure too, it'll go no farther. It's a little like the last match; it mustn't go out."

Rein was going on with his drawing, but now looked up, as if he understood nothing.

Erik smiled. "I suppose you think this is a mysterious speech," he said. "It isn't pleasant either to let others see into one's secret chamber; but I wanted you to understand the point of this. When I go from here, it'll be either one thing or the other for me."

Rein was drawing again. He had a suspicion that his wife was in the next room, and could hear everything, and now that Erik had accused him of being a bird of ill omen, she would—— The pencil in his hand began to tremble.

Evje came a step nearer, and looked towards the window with half-closed eyes. "It was good of you to come to me, Rein," he said, "and not to the people out there; for of course it's I who have the responsibility."

"That's what I thought," said Rein, without looking up from his pencil.

"But to go up there and say: 'I've set you on to something that isn't worth a penny. You've been toiling here all for nothing. Your hopes for the future are all a delusion. What you've thanked me for is only a fraud.' Can you understand what that means?"

"I can understand it may be unpleasant. But now that it's a question of their lives?"

Erik looked down, and said as if speaking to

himself: "Yes, of course." Then he slowly crossed the room again, passed his hand across his forehead and turned to his companion.

"I say, Rein, how strange it is that some get their view of life so easily, and when they've got it, settle down with it, and sail with it as a favourable wind to the end of their lives. It's different with me. You know, of course, that I've tried one thing after another, and each time I'd laboriously rolled the stone up to the top of the hill, down it rolled again. Then I'd set to work again, and then again. But it gets heavier each time, and some day it'll be the last. Honestly, I haven't the energy to begin from the bottom again. And to think that it was to be you who—who kicked it down this time."

Rein still kept his temper, and said without looking up: "It was a pity it should be me."

"Oh, of course you mean well too, at least I think so, although they say—— But don't let's talk about that. I think you mean well, but——" He broke off and began walking about again, seeming quite to forget that he was not in his own room. Now and then a pained expression came over his face, and he passed his hand across his forehead, as if to relieve it. At last he stopped once more.

"You must forgive me, Rein; I'm a little bewildered to-day. And my coming here was only like clutching at a straw. You don't know how badly things are going with me; I'm at my wits' end. You're the only person who could save me by speaking one little word; but of course you won't do it. You won't, you can't do it."

It became more and more difficult for Rein to keep calm, for everything that Erik said seemed to be a reproach against him personally.

"Well, Evje," he said, going on with his drawing, "I understand very little of all this."

Erik had begun to walk up and down again, but stopped at this, pushed his hair up from his forehead, and looked towards the window. "Since I've said so much, Rein," he said, "I may as well say the rest. Do you know what it means to feel mentally homeless? It's as if you were naked out in the snow, or as if you and every one else and the whole universe were playing out of tune, and it seems to suffocate you. I often felt that; it was like that when I came home. Everything lay in ruins about me. To comfort myself I turned to the most vulgar of all comforts—drink. All this you know. But then a little ray of sunshine came

to me again. It was the idea for these workmen's holdings. Why it became a matter of conscience with me to do a little good to others just in this way, is a thing by itself; but no one knows what it has since come to mean for me. There are so many forces warring about one at home. I have duty to my mother, to the family traditions and the work and all that; and, to tell the truth, I've been growing more and more fond of it. But money and business and calculating over and over again—all that's one thing; but whether at the same time one keeps any of one's soul is another thing. I'm one of those unhappy beings, Rein, who must have a Sunday besides the weekdays. It's true I don't go to church like you; it's also true that I don't believe in what the priest says. But all the same one has one's dreams, and even a free-thinker's heart has the need of a little sunshine in its own way. What do we know after all? Some people have a crucifix on the wall, and that for them betokens peace of mind; I have Newland. Don't you see then that—that it means something?"

Rein raised his head. "Yes," he said, "I understand that; but——"

"But?" Erik looked at him eagerly.

"There are natural laws, Evje, that don't take counsel with our dreams."

"What natural laws?"

"I'm thinking all the time of the quagmire on the Evje hills. Do you think it'll take into consideration that you have need of a crucifix?"

This inexorable answer was like a jet of cold water to Erik. He turned towards the door, and took a few steps in that direction. It was as though the mood he was in drove him to reveal his most sacred feelings to a money-lender, who answered with one humiliation after another. But on the other side of that door something still worse waited for him; in here there was still a kind of hope.

At the door he turned and took a step back into the room. "You're inexorable, Rein," he said. "I don't think I could be like you."

"But, dear me, Erik, if I said that this quagmire business wasn't so dangerous after all, do you think it would be any less dangerous for that?"

"Oh no—no, no." Erik sighed and looked down. Then he picked up his hat which had been lying on the floor, gave it a stroke with his hand, and once more moved hesitatingly towards the door. Finally he turned round

again, and said in a voice that sounded strangely sad:

"I've never understood as I do now, Rein, that to lose his last ideal can be the ruin of a man."

There was another pause. Rein adjusted his eyeglasses, and after a little thought said: "Then you think that if a man has the choice between being ruined himself, or propping himself up upon an ideal that brings others into misfortune, he should first of all look after himself?"

"Good gracious, Rein, how little you understand me. Do you think I meant to lead those people into misfortune?" He could not help smiling, and shook his head.

"What you meant has very little to do with the matter."

"Indeed! That's something I didn't know."

"I don't think the quagmire will show much consideration for your good intention."

"Good-night, Rein!"

"Good-night!" answered Rein, breathing more freely. Was this to end at last?

But though Erik had opened the door, he drew back once more, closed it again, and tried to find an objection that would have an effect upon Rein. But both his voice and his glance

seemed quite worn out as he said: "I didn't think you were such a doubter, Rein."

"Perhaps not," answered Rein, standing still in the middle of the floor and shifting his glasses. But his hand trembled. Was he to be treated to still more of this before it came to his wife's turn?

"Yes, because you think that even if an ideal helps us to be better, lifts us out of misery and makes us strong and more or less virtuous beings again, it can be humbug for all that."

"I don't remember ever having said anything about it."

"And Nature doesn't care a hang that we've staked everything upon making amends for the evil we've done. That sorrows are removed and tears dried, that the poor are housed and fed, and that a great idea is raised, that points out over centuries and millions of human beings—what the deuce do the laws of nature care about all that?"

"I haven't expressed an opinion about anything but the quagmire."

"Oh yes, the quagmire. The whole thing is so absurd. And yet we go about and fuss and imagine that there's something above that guides!" He turned his head to the door, which he opened; and as he stepped out, he

looked back for the last time and said in a tone that made it sound like a little hopeless cry: "I wish you could at any rate let me keep a little doubt."

"What would be the good of it in this case?"

Erik shook his head, but tried to smile.

Rein shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, I see," he said. "You would use the doubt to let the whole thing slide?"

Erik seemed to admit it.

"You don't understand the situation, Evje. You've been talking about yourself all the time; but don't you see that in reality this doesn't concern you?"

Erik looked astonished, and then broke into a scornful laugh. "No, of course it doesn't concern me!"

"It concerns first of all the people up there. It is their life that is being risked. But"—and a sarcastic smile passed across the speaker's face—"I would suggest your going up to those people and saying: 'Will you go on living here and daily hazarding your lives, so that I can have an ideal to live for?' "

"Good-night!" said Erik, stumbling out and banging the door; and Rein did not go after him.

The next moment another door opened, and

Fru Rein stood in the doorway, pale, and leaning against the jamb.

Rein turned towards her. "Aha!" he said. "Then I wasn't mistaken. But now, Sara, hang it all, I will have peace!"

"Very well," she said, with a frightened look at him. "If only you could get peace, Ingvald." And she tottered across the floor and out at the other door.

Chapter VIII

It was well that the horse knew its way to Evje, for the reins hung loose and the man in the carriole did not seem to notice anything. His head was sunk upon his breast, and every now and then his eyes closed as if all he wanted was to go to sleep.

But the horse wanted to get home, and jogged steadily along beside the fjord in the golden light of evening. Houses appeared to start out of the twilight, and now and again a passer-by took off his hat.

When one has made a confession out of one's innermost soul, there is a feeling of emptiness left; and because Rein had been so inexorable, Erik also felt foolish and ashamed. When he had gone there, he had been in suspense, and was now all the more unbraced.

"Why, the sun is still shining on Southland!" He raised his head and looked at the farms on the other side of the fjord, where the windows were aflame with the last rays of the setting

sun. "The sun! It doesn't care either in the least about us human beings; it's only by chance that it shines upon us."

He drove past the doctor's house, and recollected that the doctor's daughter was at home now. This brought back in his mind that summer day on the steamer the year before, when she came up to him and when she made the idea of Newland so clear. And now?

The carriole rolled on, and his head sank upon his breast again. He could not think any more. If only he could sleep!

"Aren't you going to get down?" He was aroused by these words, and found he was at home and the stableman holding the horse's head.

Erik sprang from the carriole, and went slowly up the steps with the whip in his hand. In the entry his mother met him.

"Dear me!" she said, "I couldn't think what had become of you!" Then, seeing his face, she tried to cheer him a little. "But I have a visitor," she added, with a peculiar smile.

"Mother," he said, when he had hung up his coat, "it may be you'll have to help me to—to pack a trunk this evening."

"What? Where are you going?"

"Oh, I don't quite know." He opened the door of the drawing-room and went in. Something peculiar in the atmosphere struck him, and he paused for a moment. As he did so, the curtains at the door into the next room parted, and some one in a light dress appeared. It was Inga Rud.

"Good evening!" she said in slight confusion, coming towards him with outstretched hand. "I'm sure you're surprised to meet me here; but I came with a message, and your mother was good enough to ask me to stay to supper."

"We waited ever so long for you," added Fru Evje, who had also entered; "but at last we got too hungry."

Erik was holding the little hand in his, as if he did not know what to do with it. A strange chill ran down his spine. Depressed as he was when he came in, the appearance of this woman acted as a revelation. But he recovered himself, and did and said more or less what he should have done and said. He heard himself asking how her people were, and he heard her say something about a horse that was ill. "Lady" had a bad foot, and Inga had come to ask from her father whether Erik could lend him a horse for a time.

To this Erik answered that he was quite willing; and then he discovered that his mother had left the room again, and that they were still standing in the middle of the room.

"Sha'n't we sit down?" he said, and going towards the next room he drew aside the curtain and stood aside to let her pass.

"Perhaps you'd like one of the lamps lighted?"

"Oh no, not on my account. I like the twilight so much, especially in the spring."

"Well, there's not much summer warmth here yet," he said, when they were both in the room. "I'll ring and have the fire lighted."

"Oh no! *We* can light the fire; the box is full of wood." And the next moment she was on her knees in front of the stove, getting chips together. He had to help her with some shavings, and when at last the fire blazed up, they were both close together on their knees, and remained for a moment watching the flames.

A little while after, they were each sitting in an arm-chair, with their eyes fixed upon the reflection of the flame through the stove door, flickering restlessly upon the floor.

"Perhaps you wouldn't mind playing something?" he began. "It's so seldom we have

any music here. That's what I've missed most since I came to the country."

"Oh no, let's talk. Besides, I shall have to be going home soon."

"Very well." But then he sighed. "If only I knew what to say. I'm not good at talking to ladies, Fröken Rud," he said, with an attempt at a smile.

She bent forward, so that the light from the stove flickered over her dark hair. "You haven't been very happy of late, Herr Evje."

"Oh yes, pretty well."

"I know what's happened, and what it means for you. But the worst of it is that really and truly it's all my fault. I've known it all along, ever since last year."

Erik looked at her questioningly, and there was a pained expression on his face. He did not like this woman to sit and pity him.

"And many a time I've wanted to come and warn you." Her voice trembled and grew almost tender. "But I hadn't the courage. I—I knew it would hurt you so."

It was a confession of interest, but now it was said, and involuntarily she moved her chair a little farther from his.

"That was kind of you," he said, with bowed head. Again he felt a shiver run down his

back. Ah, so much had happened to-day; was there still something else going to happen?

"Perhaps it was unkind of me—in a way. But it wasn't easy for me either. You don't know what a long year it's been."

Erik would have asked how she could have known it, she alone, ever since last year; but the fact that she had been suffering a whole year for his sake made him forget the other thing.

She went on, with her eyes fixed on the light at the stove door: "There were so many who objected to you at that time; and there must be some one to stand upon your side."

He could not believe his ears. Her words were like a caress, and he felt himself strangely helpless.

"That was good of you. Thank you!"

Then he asked her whether she thought there was as much danger as Rein said; and she, having allowed herself to say so much, could only say that Rein always exaggerated.

They talked a little more about Rein, the quagmire and Newland; but all the time they both felt that they were really talking about love.

"And so," he said, in order to get her to say it once more, "you've known this for a whole year, but——"

She raised her head and looked at him beseechingly. "Yes; but you mustn't be angry with me. I know it was wrong of me to keep silent, but the idea was so beautiful. Do you remember when we met on the steamer last year? You told me about your plans; I was the first person you had mentioned them to. You seemed a different being when you stood there and described it all to me. And afterwards—no, afterwards I *couldn't* come and destroy it."

There was a silence, broken only by the crackling of the fire. Inga leaned forward, with her hands in her lap. Erik sat leaning back in his chair, with one leg crossed over the other.

"Yes; I remember, too, the day we met last year. It was a wonderful day for me."

Once more she moved a little farther from him, as if she were afraid of what he would say next. Then they talked again about the quagmire and the danger the people were in; but he once more returned to the same question.

"Fancy that you knew it!"

"If only you could believe that I kept silence so as not to spoil it for you." And each time she repeated this, her voice grew gentler and warmer; and for him, to talk about the

quagmire, the danger the people were in, and a possible catastrophe, became something almost bright and wonderful, because it had been the cause of her thinking about him for so long.

"Poor thing!" he said, venturing now to take her hand.

"Do you pity me? Then what about yourself?"

"Oh, I'm so used to adversity."

In a little while she said, as she gently withdrew her hand: "You don't know how often I've thought about that too."

She raised her eyes from the fire to his face, and looked at him with a melancholy smile.

"Are you sitting in the dark?" It was Fru Evje, who had come in.

Inga Rud started up and said it was late, and she must be going at once or they would be anxious about her at home. Erik offered to drive her, but she declined; she thought it was such splendid weather for walking.

"Then you must go with her on foot at any rate," said Fru Evje; and to this Erik had no objection.

A little while after the two young people came out on to the doorstep, dressed for their walk. Everything around was still, the doors

all closed, and the servants gone to bed. And these two set off alone down the avenue in the grey light of the spring night.

Some hours later Erik Evje was standing at the window in his room and looking at the sun as it rose above the hills in the east. The still waters of the fjord were coloured by it, and Nature awoke; but as yet no human being was out, for it was only three o'clock, and only the sea-birds were talking down on the shore.

Erik had undressed, but could not go to bed. He looked at the blood-red sun and smiled, then at the fjord and the hills and smiled still more. A little while ago he had been down in darkness and despair, and now he was up among golden clouds. He felt inclined to burst into tears or to roar with laughter. He could thank the fates for the quagmire in Newland, for without that she would never have found her way to him. How wonderfully things were connected! "If only we love one another, everything will come right, you'll see," she had said. He still felt her kiss, warm and living, upon his lips.

He remained standing at the window in a dazed condition until the bell rang to wake the farm-hands.

BOOK III

Chapter I

In order that the Newland people could earn a daily wage, Erik had given them regular work at the sawmill; but he also decided that they should have one day free in each week, so that they could work on their own land at home. Up the little, secluded valley, out of which rose the sound of the rushing river, the forest began to give place more and more to fields and clearings. With the aid of their daily earnings, the settlers were able to finish their houses more quickly than settlers usually do. Now the houses stood in a row upon the hill, each on its piece of land; and not a window was left unglazed, most of the walls were boarded, and old Peter Tröen was busy painting his cottage red, in time for Olina's wedding.

The one who seemed to have done best was Bertil. His little white-painted cottage was like a polished box; there were flowers in the

windows, the yard was always strewn with sand, and fresh fir-boughs were always lying at the foot of the steps. This was indeed a necessity, for Ingeborg kept everything so well polished and clean inside, that people had to rub their feet a long time before they dared to go in.

But even Bertil's fields had an air of being well cared for, and the reason probably was that no sooner had he come home from the sawmill and had something to eat, than he took a spade and went out again. The evenings were so light, and here on his own land he felt happy. No one could say exactly what he did with the spade, but he left the ground as smooth and clean as if he had carefully broken every lump of earth.

It was out there that Bertil felt quite at home; for to tell the truth it was a little too fine for him up in the cottage. He did not always remember to take off his muddy shoes before he went over the floor; and if he was so thoughtless as to lie down on the bed for his afternoon nap, Ingeborg made the atmosphere of the cottage oppressive for days after.

In her heart of hearts, Ingeborg was not happy. This was not what she had imagined it would be, when year after year she used to

look across from the other side of the fjord. She was here now, and there was nothing far off to look for any longer; but when she strove, as she did, to keep everything clean and bright, it was from an indefinable desire to make her disappointment as small as possible.

There was something, too, that she could never get out of her head, and that was the thought of her mother, who was perhaps turning in her grave.

Ingeborg began to be very religious. Every evening she sang a long hymn, and Bertil tried to follow in the hymn-book, although he did not know the tune; and then, while she read a long discourse from a book of family sermons, he sat by the window looking over the fjord towards the shore where the real Ingeborg still went about. It was for that view that he had dragged the cottage up there upon his back.

It was so beautiful over there of an evening now. The windows in the houses were often aflame long after the sun had gone down. He would sit there looking across so long that he would fancy himself back in his bachelor days, and want to send a message over to Ingeborg again, and say that everything should be as it used to be between them.

The only one who did not work at the saw-mill was Lars Brovold. He preferred felling timber miles away in the forest, and he was often away several weeks at a time. Bad reports of him began to spread. Most of what he earned he spent on drink, and the rest in card-playing; and on the rare occasions when he was at home, he would ill-treat both his wife and the children.

No one could understand what made Petra so cheerful. She had no one to help her manage the little farm, she had two children, and had to spin and weave to earn the money that her neighbours' wives got from their husbands; and yet when the big, red-haired woman was out in the fields, with the two children sitting in the grass, she could be heard singing as pleased and happy as anyone could be.

She could not forget how strangely she had been saved from being sent away from Evje with her two children; and even if Lars was a little unmanageable now and then, he might improve as many others had done.

The reason why Lars did not get on at home was not only connected with Petra. It was chiefly because of the neighbour he had been so anxious to get. To know that Kristina was

so near, and another man's wife, to see her go in and out at the door, busy with her work, to see the smoke rise from her hearth and know that it was for another she was cooking, and to know that it could never, never be done over again, this gradually so oppressed him that he dreaded each time that he had to go home and see it all once more.

When he had been a week with his fellow-woodcutters far away in the forest, he could actually begin to forget that he was married. Then his spirits would rise a little, and he would begin to talk about girls like a young bachelor, and the old dreams would come back. He saw himself in uniform in church again, and the girls putting their heads together and stealing glances at him. But there was one not there, and that was Kristina. There was no use now in going to church in uniform for her sake.

"But you're a married man!" one of his companions would say, when his tongue ran on about girls. It was like a slap in the face, and he would become silent, and then steal away and sit by himself and mope. And as he lay by himself under a tree, feeling ill and miserable, a strange sound would come into his mind. It was like an old wordless song, memories of

the time when he minded goats on the heath. And now it was as though he gathered the sorrows and joys into a ram's horn, and sent the tones far, far out over distant moors.

And he would lie there and put the whole thing together, his marriage with a girl older than himself, the knowledge that he could never be anything in the world, that Kristina belonged to another, and that he himself drank and lost his money at cards—ho ho!—it would be a long wordless song to blow into the horn, far out towards the great sky out there behind all forests.

"Oh, doodeli doo!
Oh, doodeli doo!
Oh, doodeli, doodeli doo!"

When the time came for him to go home again for a while, he had to have more brandy.

Chapter II

Erik and Inga's wedding was fixed for late in the autumn, and almost every day Inga came to Evje Farm to help her future mother-in-law with one thing or another; but she also had a suspicion that in spite of everything Erik had his gloomy moments, which he tried to hide, and she did not feel easy in her mind unless she had a talk with him every day.

She was not mistaken either. When the poor man inherits a fortune, he quickly becomes accustomed to his wealth, and immediately brings new troubles on himself. During the first few days after his engagement, Erik had gone about like a smiling somnambulist, and his first thought on waking in the morning was, "It isn't a dream, it's true!" But at last the morning came when he did not say it, because he knew it too well. A little later he had to acknowledge to himself that that painful matter with Rein was not by any means done with because he was going to

marry this wonderful woman. He wondered what steps Rein would take; and when he met any of the Newland people, he felt a strange fear that they might already know what threatened them, and had come to say that they would leave the place.

Newland had never been so precious to Erik as now. It had a close personal connection with his present happiness. Inga had confessed that he had become a different man in her eyes that summer day on board the steamer, when he told her about his idea.

How could he at the same time put himself in the place of the Newland people, and look at the matter from that side? He was always thinking of this danger of a landslip, but was only concerned with what he himself would lose; and this time it was not money, property, honour or esteem, but a moral quality that he had been at great pains to gain.

"Really," he thought again and again, "I became a different being then." And he absolutely fondled this moral value in himself that she had liked, but which Rein wanted to rob him of.

He had a great deal to do with his new schemes, and now he was working for two, and planning for two—at least. But in the midst

of writing he would suddenly raise his head and lean back for a moment to sun himself in the thought of her, always accompanied by the idea that had brought them together. He saw himself on the steamer that bright summer day, pale and languid, with all his thoughts down in a dank gloom. And then she came. "Good-day, Herr Evje!" And he rises in confusion, dazzled by her nearness; and her face, with the beautiful dark eyebrows, smiles at him, and warms his frozen heart. He feels that he is ugly and unpleasant, but he has recourse to this idea to adorn himself with, like a little red favour upon his poor soul. "But that is splendid, Herr Evje. I wish you every success!" And her eyes light up when she looks at him. Was not that a wonderful time? While his gloomy ideas are being drawn out into the light of day, this one illuminates him and makes him beautiful in her eyes. For him it had up to that time only been like a clay bird, made by his clumsy hands; but she breathed upon it and said, "Fly!" and it became alive and flew. It gave him marrow and backbone; and strength of will and good spirits again. But Rein came and said to Inga: "What you've loved in Erik Evje is only humbug."

He would sit thus and let his thoughts run on until he became so melancholy that he did not know what to do.

One day Inga got him to go with her to see her uncle, a famous painter, who was a professor at an art school in Germany, and who had now hired a house up there for the summer.

The house was up on the hill, not far beyond the Evje lands.

When they had come out of the wood and passed through the garden gate, they heard the sound of music from the house; but down among the flower-beds was a little man in a white coat, weeding. "There he is!" said Inga. The little man stood up, moved his spectacles, and made a grimace at being disturbed; but all of a sudden he rushed up to them, crying: "Why, Gott in Himmel, is it you, Inga?"

The music indoors ceased, and soon a little grey-haired lady came out on to the verandah with a white shawl over her shoulders. It was the little man's wife.

"Oh, how nice!" she said.

Erik had seldom met such pleasant people. Nothing would do but that the two young people should stay to supper. The professor

took it into his head that he would prepare the meal this time, and his wife smiled and told them that he had done that once before, but that he had put mustard in the tea and boiled the eggs for an hour and a half. The professor laughed, his wife laughed, and the other two enjoyed the way the two old people kept poking fun at one another.

While they were sitting out on the verandah after supper, the little professor wandered about and enlarged with delight upon the joy of being at home again. He kept himself informed of all that that gone on when he was abroad, and saw everything at home in a kind of glory of home-sick longing. There was no place like Norway. "Look there! Isn't that wonderfully beautiful?" he exclaimed suddenly, spreading out his arms towards the mountains and the open fjord, across which the sinking sun in the west laid a great burning column. "Look there! Can you, in the whole wide world, find anything to equal that?"

Then he patted his wife's cheek, but suddenly turned to Erik. "And you," he said, moving his spectacles, "you've founded quite an ideal community up there. Wasn't it you, Inga, who wrote to me about it last winter?"

"I may have mentioned it in a letter," she answered, at the same time sending Erik a radiant glance that said: "See how I thought about you even then."

The professor was instantly ready to trot up and down and rave about the time when every single family would have its own house and garden. But though Erik was flattered at the great man's interest, he could not help at last saying: "There are, unfortunately, a few people who prophesy evil about that matter."

"Prophesy?" exclaimed the little man, stopping and directing his spectacles at Erik. "If you start anything good, you must be prepared for prophecies."

"What do they prophesy?" asked the little old lady, looking up from her work.

Erik had hardly said what it was before the professor made a grimace and threw out his hands. "What nonsense!" he cried. "Norwegian land not able to support a few matchboxes of houses! Ha ha! It must be a bird of ill omen that prophesies things like that." And he grew angry, and trotted up and down more excitedly, while he tried to relight his cigar. It was evident that he would not hear of any fault in his beloved Norwegian land,

upon which he had at last set foot again; it disturbed his ideal of the country about which he had just spoken so enthusiastically.

"What nonsense!" he repeated. "A landslip on the Evje hills, because the land had become a blessing to a whole lot of poor creatures? Don't you be alarmed, my friend. That land up there has lain quiet for many a winter's day before now."

It was the first time Erik had talked to any one who spoke a comforting word so decisively. It was true that the professor could not give an opinion as an expert; but in this matter Rein could not be absolutely certain either. The whole thing was a question of venturing—or not venturing.

"What would you have done in my place, Professor?" he asked. "Would you, on the word of another man, have gone up and asked them to leave the place?"

The professor adjusted his spectacles and looked at his wife. "What do you say, Lisa?"

The old lady looked at him with a glance full of reminiscence. "Oh, we two," she said, "we two have always stuck to what we had begun."

"Yes, we have," said her husband, beginning to trot up and down again and to talk

about his own doings, about the time when he broke with the Düsseldorf school. They had prophesied all kinds of evil for him, but look how things had turned out! No, a man should go straight ahead, or he'll never be anything. "If I'd listened to the prophets then, I should never have found myself, never." And both the professor and those who listened to him had a distinct impression that he was giving Erik Evje good advice, although all the time he was trotting up and down and talking about the Düsseldorf school and himself.

As the two young people walked homewards in the light June evening, they both felt in such good spirits that they now and then put their arms around one another, and joked and laughed.

Inga's light summer dress looked almost white against the green fir-trees, and the wide brim of her straw hat waved up and down at every step. Down by the water they stood still and looked out over the fjord, whose smooth surface reflected the blue sky and the heavy, reddish-grey clouds. An eider-duck with her young ones glided past, the mother fussily careful, the little ones like balls of feathers, working hard to keep up, but leaving such tiny rings behind them on the water.

"Have you noticed," said Erik, "that this year there's something new among the eider-ducks? There's always a lady companion with the mother and the young ones, or perhaps it's a nurse." And he pointed to another eider-duck going behind them .

She leaned her arm upon his shoulder and smiled at the birds. "And I," she said at last, "I suppose I shall have a lady companion too, or——" She stopped suddenly, and picked up a small stone.

"Yes, or a nurse," he added.

"Be quiet!" she said, blushing a little; but the eyes of both rested with fresh interest upon the little birds, as the little waves rocked them up and down on the water.

"Do you think Rein is happy with his wife?" asked Erik suddenly.

She looked at him quickly. She had thought that his thoughts were busy with their future, which these young birds had reminded them of. But once more the same everlasting anxiety had dragged him away from that, and she was quite unnecessary.

She answered a little coldly: "No, I don't on the whole think that man's troubled with affection."

"Ye-es," said Erik. "People like Rein suf-

fer perhaps most themselves. He's got a splinter in his eye, and sees the whole world in a magic mirror."

But Inga knew all too well that it was really not Rein at all that Erik was talking about. For a moment he had been with her in an idyll while they looked at the eider-duck and her little ones; but suddenly he had seen the bird of prey above them, the daily scruples and anxiety always about the same thing, which now began to be a disease in him.

This must be put an end to, and suddenly a bold thought came to her. "I say!" she said; "I think we should go up to Newland this evening."

He looked at her quickly. "What? What should we go up there for?"

Her face suddenly assumed an energetic expression. "Well, we may just as well go up now, for it'll have to be done some time."

"Really?"

She slipped her hand through his arm. "I think we should tell them the truth, Erik, for it can't always be hidden.

He became angry. "Truth! Truth! Are you beginning to hold with Rein, too?"

"Why, dear me, Erik, surely it's better that you prepare them for what Rein says, than

that it should come from others? Then the people up there can decide for themselves whether they'll remain there or not. And then, of course, you won't have any responsibility any longer."

Erik pushed back his straw hat and looked down. "Yes," he allowed; "perhaps that wasn't such a bad idea."

"No, is it, Erik? Come along, then." And she drew him with her.

But he still resisted. Suppose they alarmed them quite unnecessarily, so that they did not dare to live there another day.

"Oh, nonsense! Those people have common-sense too. But even if it were to be as bad as that, it would be better to put an end to it. As things are now, you think a great deal more about Rein than about me."

"Yes," he said again, passing his hand across his forehead. "And I should like to have done with this."

They went part of the way homewards along the fjord, he trying to talk of other things; but as they approached the river where the road turned up over the cliffs to Newland, he began making excuses again. Anyhow it was too late to go up there this evening. They might have gone to bed.

But Inga took his arm again, and drew him along. "Just you come!" she said as gaily as she could. "It's no good your making any more excuses."

They crossed the river, which thundered beneath the red wooden bridge, and Erik stopped for a moment, and looked down into the yellowish-blue water. "Is it you," he thought, "who will one day wash Newland away?" For an instant he gazed into the question of the mighty, blind, natural laws, which do not consider either evil or good in the world. Was it so? Was this river stronger than a great, beautiful idea? Man, driven by a divine desire for the good, may build for the good and happiness of perhaps thousands, but a little river is enough to hurl it all into the abyss. Was it so? And he seemed to see the fate of Rein—scepticism, Mephistopheles, hatred of all that was bright and good in the world. *He* had the laws of nature upon his side.

"Come now!" said Inga, drawing him on.

A little way farther up he stopped. "Your uncle, Inga, is a great optimist. How it freshens one up to be with a man who looks at everything so brightly."

"Oh, you'll come to look at things just as brightly some day, too, Erik."

"If I could only think so!" he sighed, as he moved on with her again. But the way was more toilsome than it had ever been before. It was as though he were voluntarily going up to his little community and putting himself to shame in their eyes. And suppose they were to leave the place this very evening!

Erik kept on stopping to take breath. A number of scenes from the past, connected in one way or another with Newland, passed before his mind's eye. He saw himself alone among the merry-makers that 17th-of-May evening. That was when this idea was born, coming to him like a friend offering him his hand. "I will be with you; you shall no longer be alone." Then he remembered the long, torturing nights with pricks of conscience and painful memories, when he sought in vain for comfort and relief outside himself, in which to forget himself. And then came again this idea like a bright power that paid, as it were, his debt of sin, and allowed him to be young and happy again. And finally it was his home, when sunk deep in drink and despair he seized upon this idea as on a life-buoy. The farm foreman came. Now or never. And from

that time the nights grew brighter than before: he felt no fear of falling asleep. He was once more connected with something that pointed out over his own short life; indeed, he had actually began to catch a glimpse of a sky that was no longer quite so indifferent and empty.

And now—in a few minutes he would be standing and pulling the whole thing to pieces.

When they came to the gate into the outfield, he stopped again and looked back. "No!" he said, passing his hand across his forehead; "I won't go any farther, Inga. You must know it's too late this evening."

"Come now! Come now!" She had already opened the gate and was standing holding it open for him.

"No; don't you hear? I won't go any farther." And he sat down on a stone and pulled a blade of grass, which he began to twist between his fingers.

"Now, Erik, you surely don't want to bring me to despair? If we go back now, I am really at my wits' end."

There was a pause, and he sat looking down at the piece of grass which he was twisting mechanically between his fingers. At last he said, with a sigh, without looking at her: "If

I hadn't told you about the workmen's holdings last year, that day on the steamer, Inga, we should hardly be engaged now."

"What nonsense you're talking. Do come, Erik, when I beg you so hard."

At last he looked up at her, and tried to smile. "And now, if they begin at once to move down again, what will there be left of me—in your eyes?"

"Now, Erik, how *can* you talk like that. It's really horrid of you." She came up and kissed him, but took hold of him again, saying: "Come now, dear!"

Erik felt a little ashamed of having let fall his last remark, and in order to give it the appearance of a joke, he rose and went with her, although his feet could scarcely carry him.

They passed the sawmill, where the river vainly dashed its spray against the wheels, now that the work was stopped for the day; and soon they came to the last hill, from which the first cottage in Newland could be seen.

Inga, too, was anxious, for she knew what this matter meant for her fiancé; and as the decisive moment approached, she felt like one who watches the effect of a dangerous medicine upon some one he loves. It might make

the patient well, but there was also another possibility.

The nearer they came to Newland, the more fateful did their errand seem. The people *must* choose to stay on there—they must, they must? "Oh, if only they decide to do that!" she thought.

At last they opened the last gate, and entered Bertil's little property.

"They've gone to bed, I think," said Erik, coming to a standstill.

"No, don't you hear the sound of wood-chopping? Come along!"

Chapter III

When Inga saw the big man who stood outside the cowshed chopping wood, she stood still for a moment, and during that moment she found it impossible to think whether the man was actually in danger by living here. He seemed to be a mystic being, who was to decide their fate by a "yes" or a "no." Erik felt something of the same sort, and, as they approached the house, their hands involuntarily met.

They exchanged greetings. Bertil wiped his forehead, and stood, a little embarrassed, leaning upon the handle of his axe. This visit, so late as it was, was a little strange.

Inside the little cowshed could be heard the sound of milking. Bertil was the first of the Newland people who had invested in a cow.

They talked a little on various subjects. Erik could see that the crops here were in better condition than those of Bertil's neigh-

bour, Lars Brovold. That, said Bertil, was because Lars had been so late with his spring work; but it might still improve there too, if they had rain.

At last Ingeborg came out of the cowshed, with the milking-stool in front of her, and her skirts turned up. She was stout but pale, and her face was one of those that look as if they had long since given up laughing, and had stiffened into seriousness that savours of psalm-singing and gloomy weather.

Inga could not stand still, so impatient was she. She could hear her heart beating, but at last, at last Erik came to the object of their visit. He stood nervously digging his stick into the sand while he was at great pains to repeat accurately and dispassionately what Rein asserted; but in conclusion he could not resist adding what the Professor had said about the land there having lain through many a winter's day before this.

When he finished there was a pause. Ingeborg had been standing with the milking-stool in front of her, looking away to one side, as if she were at a prayer-meeting. Bertil first looked at her, but quickly turned his eyes in another direction, until he found what he sought, far off on the other side of the fjord,

where the sun flamed in the windows of a house.

Inga looked from one to the other. She was so anxious now, that she thought: "If they say that they'll leave the place, I'll take care to let them know how ungrateful they are."

But it was not like Bertil to answer at once to this. He withdrew his gaze from the distant spot out on the other side of the fjord, looked along the land that he had tilled, recalled the first day he was free and began to clear the ground, and looked at the cottage that he had carried up upon his back in order to get a certain view. It was the whole of his little world, beyond which his thoughts seldom ventured. Give it up? Then all his hard work had been in vain.

He began to wander about a little to think it over, but came to a standstill opposite his distant view. It seemed to Inga that it took an incredible time.

"What do you say?" Erik asked at last.

Bertil considered again for some time before he answered: "Oh, I think as you do, sir, that the land has lain here for many a winter's day before this."

Ingeborg sighed and added: "And if the

Almighty wants to punish us, it doesn't matter where we move to; but if He wants to preserve us, we're just as safe here as anywhere else."

Erik and Inga soon went on farther, but, when they had got behind the houses, Inga had to sit down for a moment to dry her eyes. She would have liked to breathe out freely, to rejoice and throw her arms around Erik's neck; but it was not all over yet, for the others might answer differently from Bertil. She did say, however: "There, you can see, Erik. And people who have worked upon the land all their lives should be allowed to have an opinion in such a matter."

Erik was pale, but smiled now. "Did you hear what Ingeborg said? 'If God wants to preserve us,' she said. Happy people, who have kept the faith of their childhood like that!"

They found Petra standing on her doorstep, scrubbing a saucepan. Lars had come home from the timber-felling, but just now was in at their neighbour's Knut Rabben. Petra planted her wet hands on her hips, and listened with curiosity to what Erik told her about Rein.

She glanced at the land that she had worked

upon alone so many a day already, at this property that had so suddenly lifted her up from shame and dishonour. To leave this? How would Lars treat her then, if he had not even this as compensation?

And she sighed and answered with the remark that Erik had so sensibly made—namely, that the land had lain quiet enough here for many a winter's day before this.

As Erik and Inga left her, they heard the energetic scraping of the saucepan resumed. The story did not seem to have alarmed her very much.

They went on over rough ground, and climbed over the fence into Knut Rabben's land. Inga said: "I can quite understand, Erik, why you've become so fond of these people. Did you notice what pretty eyes Petra has?"

A pair of crows flew up over their heads and settled in the wood farther off. There was no one to be seen outside Knut's house, but they soon heard the sound of several voices inside. They went into a little spotless room with fir twigs strewn over the floor. Lars was sitting upon the bench near the door, smoking, and Knut and Kristina were having their supper; for in the summer country people end the day

late. Kristina started up and tried to find something to put straight in the room, a coat to move away, a chair to bring forward. The slim young woman with the flaxen hair and the scar on her cheek was soon to be a mother.

Inga and Erik sat down, and he began at once to tell them his errand. He wanted them to know, he said, and then they could judge for themselves.

Kristina looked anxiously at her husband, and put down her spoon. Knut pushed his red hair up from his forehead and looked at Lars; but Lars was looking at Erik almost with hatred in his eyes. It was he who had induced him to marry Petra. "Is he going to do me out of the little I got in exchange too?" he thought.

"Oh no!" he said aloud, looking as if he were keeping back something that another wanted to draw from him. "I say, too, that the land has lain still here for many a winter's day before this."

Erik looked at him, and read in his eyes what he had feared. These people, who had hitherto worshipped him, would ask why the deuce he had fooled them into coming up here if the land was worthless.

At last Knut laid down his spoon, and got

up to light his pipe. Erik and Inga looked at him a little anxiously, for he looked irresolute.

"We-ell," he said, "landslips do sometimes happen." Again Kristina looked anxiously at him.

But now Lars was afraid that these two might determine to move, and bad though it was to see Kristina as another man's wife, if they perhaps went so far away that he could never see her any more, it would be a thousand times worse.

"It's all nonsense!" he said. "That Rein's always going about telling old-wives' tales. I worked for him by the day once, but we were well-nigh starved. He's a nice fellow!"

This seemed to be a good argument for Knut. "Oh, is he that sort of man?" he said, getting his pipe alight at last; and in a little while he said to Erik that if Bertil and Lars could stay there, so could he.

Once more the two went on their way through the light summer evening. But Erik felt that the worst was still to come, for he had to stand before Olina and, as it were, say: "The compensation you received wasn't worth a penny."

"I'm not equal to any more this evening,"

he said suddenly. "We can come up here to-morrow."

"No, no. You'll sleep better when it's all over. Come now!"

Old Peter Tröen was sitting upon the grass outside the cottage, making a birch-broom, while Töger was going about with a wheel-barrow, and sprinkling sand outside the doors; for the wedding was to take place in a day or two. Presently Olina came out on to the kitchen steps, and when she saw Erik, she made an unconscious movement of her hand to smooth her hair.

Inga noticed this and winced; and while the two men listened to what Erik had to say, the two women stood looking at one another. Inga said to herself: "So Erik has belonged to that woman before he belonged to me; and if she decides to leave the place, I know he'll be pondering over something else to give her."

"Does she grudge me the land here?" thought Olina. "Does she want him to take it back?"

The old man stood with his hands behind him, looking down. He had toiled hard many a day up here for Olina's sake. Töger thrust his hands into his pockets and looked at Olina. Since his promotion to be a landowner up

here, people had not laughed at his deformity.

Olina looked at Erik, and involuntarily pulled down her sleeves. "She sha'n't succeed in having me left alone with my shame again," was her thought; and she said to Töger that she thought the same as Erik—the land up there had lain through many a winter before this.

Every time this remark was echoed by one of the people up here, it sounded to Erik like an assurance of confidence and devotion; and each time it was as though a burden had been lifted off his own shoulders, so that he could go on free.

As they were climbing another fence, Inga could not resist standing upon the topmost bar and jodeling out over the hills until the echoes rang, as a vent to her joy.

The miller was a fat little man, and was now wandering about his little garden with a pipe in his mouth. When he saw the two up on the road, it gave him a little shock, and he called in through the open window to his wife: "Give the pigs a little food—quickly—to keep them quiet; for there are visitors coming."

The miller had rather a bad conscience, and always tried to hide how many pigs he kept; for already people were beginning to wonder

what he got his meal for. When, therefore, Inga and Erik came up and he heard what they had to say, it would be no worse for him. He agreed with Erik that the land had lain quiet there for many a winter's day before this.

At last Inga and Erik started for home. Down in the valley the calm river lay like a sinuous strip of blue sky, and from the fir-clad hill that rose, dark and thick, upon the other side of it, came the sound of a single cow-bell.

They walked hand in hand, but out on the bluffs, where no one could see them, Inga threw her arms around Erik's neck. "Are you satisfied now, Erik?"

"This has been a wonderful walk, Inga," he replied, stroking her cheek again and again.

"Are you satisfied?" she asked. "Will you, after this, think a little about me too?"

He looked into her face for a moment with a smile. A strange medley of scenes was passing through his mind, and among them that evening when the working-men's association in Kristiania deserted him, and Mogstad won. But now! Things had turned out differently this evening.

"Erik, what are you thinking about?"

He pressed his lips to hers in a long kiss, and the consciousness that together they had succeeded in bringing something into port, made them both tremble with love for one another.

"Inga, Inga, how lovely you are!"

"Let me go! You quite take away my breath." And she gently freed herself.

On the next hill, where the valley and the silvery-grey fjord opened out before them, they sat down, each on a little mound, and looked down. Far out in the west, the sky rose, pure and golden, from behind the blue line of mountains. It was midnight now, but there was no twilight, but a clear, silent daylight.

"What are you thinking about, Erik?"

He lay back on the grass, put his hands behind his head, and looked up at the sky, which up there was of such a deep, intense blue. Presently he said: "It's strange how different the values are that we run after. I wonder whether these simple people in Newland don't understand more than we do, who imagine that we've read and thought."

"Yes."

But Erik was thinking about something else. It was that remark that the land had lain

quiet for many a winter's day before this, which the old artist had given out in his patriotic enthusiasm. This Erik had seized upon and constantly made use of; it was so obviously popular and said so much, and it acted everywhere like a magic bond that helped him to bind the people to their homes up there.

As he lay there, he wished that this remark had not had the effect of persuasion, but that it had been the people's own common-sense that had determined them.

"How silent you are, Erik!"

"I can't forget what Bertil's wife said. 'If the Almighty wants to preserve us,' she said, 'we're just as safe here.' It's touching to hear such childlike faith. And perhaps they really all have it, since they've all decided to remain."

There was silence again for a little while, during which they heard only the rush of the river coming up from the valley. Then Erik turned his head and said, with a smile: "And you believe in God, don't you, Inga?"

She sighed a little, and answered: "Why, don't you?"

He smiled, and looked up again into the endless blue. "What do we know, Inga? I know no more than you. But if after this my

mind is at rest and I am allowed to live many years with you, I would gladly give up all delights after death."

She laid her hand upon his hair before she said: "Your mind at rest? Why shouldn't it be now? I'm sure I hope it will be, Erik."

"Yes, oh yes." He took her hand and pressed it almost convulsively, as he said: "Thank you, Inga, for going up there with me this evening."

Chapter IV

When a man recoils from an action that he feels to be required of him, but which at the same time will demand too great a sacrifice, he often finds comfort in philosophising. This was the case with Rein. As he flew along the roads on his bicycle to inspect roads and bridges, or sat in his office among papers and drawings, his thoughts would sometimes take a little rest from business matters, and a question would come up in his mind that he could now never get rid of: "What are you going to do about Erik Evje? Why do you keep putting off doing something?"

He often came home with the determination that it should be done to-morrow; but to-morrow came, and it was not done. He carefully avoided saying anything more about the matter to his wife. They were once more on good terms with one another, and her thought for him, and the comfort with which she filled

the rooms, had the effect upon him of a prayer that he would do nothing more in the matter.

He happened to be sitting on the sofa, listening to her playing, and, while the music was going on he saw himself in a clearer light, and preached himself a sermon. "Perhaps it *is* true that I am a bird of ill omen. What good do we do the world, we who take to heart the evil that happens here or there? We are like a telephone station, always being rung up from one place or another. Here a great wrong has been done, there a dangerous lie has been taken for truth by everybody, up there a rogue has been elevated into a saint, and down there a good man misunderstood and wronged. It is always ringing, and always feels like a stab in one's own heart. 'Oh!' we cry, and spring up and rush off to put things straight; and we're so taken up with feeling and putting right, that we haven't a moment left for our own happiness. There is, for instance, something called beauty. There are women. There is poetry and music. Flowers blossom in the gardens every spring and summer. How much attention have you paid to all this? Now you have a home, with a beautiful woman in it, and you might be happy; but you imperil it all for a thing so

unimportant as that a few workmen will be carried free of charge into the lower regions some fine day. They must all die some day, and, moreover, you've warned them. What more can you do? Why in the world then do you go and wail any more over it?

He determined that there should also be an end to those angry newspaper articles. He would no longer take to heart things that did not directly concern himself. Every time, up to the present, that he had interfered in things that did not concern him, he had only succeeded in bringing on himself vexations and a great many enemies. It was about time that he came to reason.

All this he said to himself over and over again, and yet he could not quite get rid of the thought of those five families, over whose heads there daily hung an inevitable catastrophe.

The end of it was that one day he wrote a letter to Erik Evje. His wife need know nothing about it. But as if she had guessed what he was engaged in, she came suddenly into the room. Rein felt like a schoolboy that is caught cheating, and quickly laid a piece of blotting-paper over the letter.

"What are you doing, dear?" she asked,

coming up and seating herself upon his knee.

"Oh, I'm writing, as you see. Leave me alone for a little, and then perhaps we'll go for a row when I've finished.

She drew the blotting-paper aside with a smile, and at once saw Erik Evje's name. At this she rose quickly, and going to the window, stood looking out.

"Really?" she said at last. "Do you think it's a suitable time to do this now, just as Erik and Inga have got married?"

Rein sat pulling at his beard but did not answer.

"For that matter," she added, "Erik Evje has explained to the Newland people what you told him; but they chose to remain there all the same."

"What?" exclaimed Rein, getting up. "They chose to go on living there, just the same?"

"Yes," said his wife, almost triumphantly.

"Then he must have explained things in a peculiar way."

"You've no right to say that, Ingvald. Inga told me herself, and she went up there with him."

Rein looked for a little while at the letter

he had begun, and at last said, "Very well," and taking up the paper, tore it in pieces.

Fru Rein moved about the room putting things away, and Rein stood looking out of the window at the fjord running blue under the north wind.

They had chosen to go on living there! It could not be from indifference to life. Oh no, not at all. But Erik must have wrapped up his warning in phrases that put the matter in a false light; for when people like these Newland people had to choose in such a matter of life and death, they could not be altogether without common-sense.

"Didn't you say we could go for a row?" asked Fru Rein from the other window.

Rein sighed. "Yes, certainly," he replied, after a slight pause. "By all means let us go."

Even after that day, however, Rein felt that he was not quite finished with this matter. They had chosen themselves, these people, but how preposterously. He might go up and explain things to them, but of course it would be put down as policy, and it would benefit no one, and only bring fresh annoyance to himself. There was nothing to be done. Rein again had the feeling of having a newspaper article returned, and again he had to go and

swallow his righteous indignation that no one in the world took the slightest notice of.

"That's how things go," he thought, beginning to philosophise. "If I were wise, I'd throw the truth to the winds, and go in for flowers and wine and beauty and a happy belief in the good in man, and then perhaps they'd call me an idealist too."

The good? Erik Evje's arguments during their last encounter began to come into Rein's mind, and they gave food for much reflection. Newland was a crucifix to Evje, and an ideal, and a matter of conscience. Rein would sometimes stand still in the middle of the high-road to ponder on the connection between ideals and conscience.

Autumn set in with rain and mist, and a heavy white steam hung over the fjord. Every morning when Rein awoke, he expected to hear of a disaster at Newland; but towards the end of September the weather became bright again, and the trees stood in the sunshine like blood-red roses upon the hillsides.

On one of these days Rein was wandering through the woods with his gun over his shoulder. He was tired after having been out shooting since the early morning, and he stopped again and again to whistle to his dog, which

he could still hear giving tongue away on the hill. He saw that the shortest way down to the village would be to follow the river down past Newland, and he decided to do this. The river twisted in and out through the rocks, and, as Rein approached Newland, he suddenly stopped and gazed across at the other side. The river here was fairly rapid, but encountered the hillside, and had to turn to go around it. But there in the turn it had torn down a whole hill in the last few days; and, what was worse, it seemed to disappear under the hill, to return again in silent eddies. It had eaten its way under the earth there, and would be sure to eat its way farther in as the autumn advanced. Newland lay just below, and a landslip might take place at any time.

"Now it's serious," thought Rein. "Now I shall have to go up and speak to those people."

But he did not. He had made up his mind that he would do nothing behind Evje's back, so it would be better to talk to Evje himself once more.

When he came farther down, he found himself suddenly just opposite Newland. There on the slope on the other side of the river lay the five small farms, sending up smoke into

the still autumn air. A strange feeling seized him. Could those smiling homes and their owners be doomed?

He again whistled to his dog, and threw himself down on the ground to wait for him. The sun had made the heather warm, the sky was blue, and high up above the ridge hung a solitary hawk on the watch.

Rein put his hands behind his head, and looked across to Newland, where the lands together formed a long strip cut out of the forest. On each man's land he saw people out at work. On one they were digging up new land, on another cutting the yellow corn, and on a third a woman was trying to tether a cow on the slope. At one place he saw a man coming down from the wood with a great bundle of wood upon his shoulder, which he threw down outside the cowshed. As Rein lay there mechanically gazing across, he began to ponder again.

"Those people," he thought, "believe it's for themselves they're toiling, but in reality it's so that Erik Evje shall have an ideal. That's what it is. He's planted them there just as we others plant pines as a shelter from the north wind. His father used the people inconsiderably for the benefit of his purse,

and Erik Evje for his conscience. The one man's selfishness is just as brutal as the other's."

Crucifix! Ideals! Conscience!

He recollected a student of divinity who had become a fanatical "dialect" agitator, because he had at one time scoffed at the dialect spoken by his poor mother. She was now dead, but he was going to atone, and for this purpose all Norwegians must lend themselves.

The crucifix and conscience!

He remembered a friend who lost his wife in a fire, and in his despair he became a missioner, and finally travelled along the highroads followed by a singing, weeping crowd. It was a comfort to him to communicate his funereal state of mind to old and young; and when he succeeded in converting the happiness of a newly-married pair to the same despair that he felt, he raised his eyes to heaven and felt that he had entered into an alliance with God.

How many human souls have prophets and popular leaders crucified for similar reasons?

"That man," thought Rein, raising his eyes, "is modest after all. He is content with hanging five families upon the cross. With that his conscience is satisfied."

The river roared and the sun shone hot upon him, and so occupied was he with his thoughts, that he did not notice his dog until it pushed its nose into his face.

At last he started off again with his gun over his shoulder and his heavy game-bag upon his back. As he went, he threw a last glance at Newland, saying to himself: "No, they've themselves chosen to go on living there, and if I went and told them the truth, they'd only think me a reactionist and a hater of the poor. It's no affair of mine. I've made up my mind to be an idealist for the future and not a bird of ill omen." And he tramped on with a peculiar smile upon his face.

Chapter V

Petra and Lars were carrying the sheaves of corn in from the field lower down the hill. The east wind was swaying the branches of the trees on the slope, and now and then whirled yellow leaves and straw above their heads. Petra had a large handkerchief over the back of her neck, to keep the ears of corn from pricking her, and Lars, for the same reason, wore a sou'wester.

There were only four corn-stakes left, when Lars, on his way down, seated himself on a stone and took out his pipe. Petra stopped and looked at him. "Sha'n't we get in those stakes now before it gets dark?" she asked.

"There's no more than you can manage," he answered, beginning to scrape out his pipe.

Petra objected, saying that she had a good deal still to do that evening, the children to put to bed, the floor to wash, and the supper to prepare; but as Lars did not appear to hear her, she sighed and went down to the field

alone. There she took hold of another stake, dragged it backwards and forwards to loosen it, and at last got it out of the ground and balanced upon her shoulder. The heavy weight bent her double as she began to work her way up the hill, the broad surface of the corn-stake hiding her head and back and leaving only her legs visible toiling up towards the barn.

"Yes, now she may go at it," thought Lars as he lighted his pipe and remained seated. For his part, he had done enough for that day.

But as Petra threw down the corn in the barn, she heard the children screaming pitifully in the cottage. She went to the window and looked in, trying not to be seen; for, if they caught sight of her, the disturbance would be worse than ever.

There in the darkening room she saw the eldest boy, whom she had before her marriage, creeping about on the table, picking up crumbs and putting them in his mouth. In the cradle lay the youngest, screaming because the little dwarf, who should have been rocking the cradle, was no longer paying any attention to it, but sat making hooks out of brass wire. The dwarf was a deformed lad that Petra had taken at the cost of the parish, so that she

could earn a few coppers. He was twenty, but so twisted with rheumatism that he was no bigger than a boy of eight; but he was energetic and neat-handed, and worked at little things to earn a few pence to buy books.

Petra knocked carefully on the window-pane, so that he, and not the children, should hear her, and then hurried down to the field again.

Lars, still sitting on the stone, watched her. He found the work in his fields at home harder and harder, and his neighbours were already far ahead of him. Moreover, he began to feel that he had been persuaded to take the land in exchange for Kristina; and when he thought over it, the work would drop from his hands, and he would sit and brood as he was now doing.

If he could only get out of his head those fancies about some day being a bachelor again and going to church in uniform; for they always stopped short at the fact that Kristina at any rate was no longer at church as an unmarried girl, no matter how fine his uniform was. It was too late. What was done could not be undone.

When all this came over him, it was a comfort to him to go home to his parents in the

little fisherman's cottage, and stay the night there. In the little attic he seemed to find his youth again, and could think about the future as he used to do.

While he sat there, Petra came up the hill with a corn-stake, but this time he did not see her, for he was gazing vacantly across at the hills beyond the river, where the twilight was rising, together with the ceaseless roar of the water.

When at last he rose, he saw that there were only two corn-stakes left standing, and one of those he might just as well have taken. But he did not do it. When Petra once more went down, he hurried up to the cottage, where he found a little water to wash his hands and face, and then crossed the field, climbed the fence, and made his way through the thicket of alder that still separated his land from Knut's. To-day Kristina would be at home alone. And as he approached the buildings, he saw that this was the case, and that she was bringing in the corn alone.

She had tied a sheet about her head to protect it from the ears, and when she came out of the barn and saw him, she stood for a moment pushing locks of hair in under it, and ashamed of her appearance.

"Are you working here quite alone?" said Lars, as with his hands in his pockets he sauntered towards her.

"Yes, Knut's at the sawmill to-day," she answered, picking up an ear of corn from the barn bridge, and rubbing it between her red hands.

Lars felt his heart leap. Now they could be alone together for a little. If only he did not say something stupid again. When he was away from her, it was so easy to think how he should express himself; but no sooner did they come together than it all came to a standstill.

"You've got in your corn, I suppose?" she asked.

"Oh yes," answered Lars. "I just carried in the last stakes now, so perhaps I could take a hand with yours. It's a shame that a poor woman should go out and wear herself out with such work."

"Oh, you mustn't give up your time to me," said Kristina, glancing up at him in her old way. "But it's a good thing, all the same, that I can get away in to my little screamer." And she went up to the window and peeped into the room, where a little creature was lying asleep.

All was quiet here, however, and she went down with Lars towards the cornfield. Lars pulled up a stake for her, and took one himself and started off with it. The corn felt lighter here than at home. And when he came out of the barn and met Kristina below the bridge, a feeling of tenderness seized him at sight of the pretty girl weighed down by her heavy burden. "Give it to me," he said, lifting it from her shoulders on to his own. "The bridge is too steep at any rate for a little thing like you."

When he came back again, she was standing waiting for him, so that they could go down to the field together.

It was nice to be beside her, but he must give it up now, so that she could rest, poor thing. "There are no more stakes there than I can bring in alone," he said.

"Oh, that would be too bad!" she protested; but he would not give in. She must be careful and not do too much.

This care for her was the only way in which he could show her his affection now; for since they had married, no word ever passed between them of what had been.

It began to grow dark, and the valley below became black. Kristina had gone in and put

the kettle on; but, even after it had grown pitch dark, she could see from the window the light corn-stakes moving up and vanishing into the barn.

When Lars had at last finished, he thought of slipping away quietly; but Kristina had been on the watch for him, and would not let him go before he had had a cup of coffee.

He never cared very much about going in there, for there was so much in the cottage that distinctly showed that she belonged to another man; but now she had really made things smart for him, for a white cloth was spread upon the table, and the silver sugar-basin and cream-jug were set out, as if he had been a distinguished stranger.

Lars sat down carefully at the table, so as not to upset anything, and folded his hands for a moment under the table-cloth. Then he had to drink two cups of coffee, and take some ginger-bread with it, while she stood at the stove and drank a cup. But every time she came to him with more coffee, a thrill passed through him because her skirts touched his knee.

"I hope you aren't afraid about that nonsense that Engineer Rein has been talking about," he said, so as to appear a little fatherly

towards her. And then he began to assure her that there was nothing in it. Töger, the shoemaker, was said to be afraid every day now—ha ha!—because the river had torn away a bank of clay up here in the bend; but that was nonsense. Kristina thought so too; it was as Evje had said—the land had lain there quietly for many a winter's day. And for Lars there seemed to open up a long, safe future, when they could always live here and be so near one another.

"I wonder whether Knut won't soon be on his way home," said Kristina suddenly, going to the window.

"There! She misses him now too," said Lars to himself, his courage sinking. He made haste to leave the table and thank her for the entertainment. She would not care much about him after this, no matter how much he came and helped her.

When he left the cottage, he made a detour so as not to meet Knut; but when he got to the fence, he sat down and began to scrape out his pipe. A little later he heard footsteps, and then some one climbed over the fence up by the path. It was Knut, who passed close by him, with an axe over his shoulder.

It seemed strange to see this man sauntering

homewards so indifferently, when a wife like Kristina sat and waited for him.

Lars smoked his pipe out, and then another. At last he rose, but still could not go home. He wandered about in the dark for some time, looking up at the lighted window in Knut and Kristina's cottage; and at last he approached carefully, with noiseless step, and going up to the window, looked in.

The two were sitting one at each side of the table, eating their supper of porridge. They were talking and laughing, for they were still like a newly-married couple towards each other. She became so merry that she splashed a spoonful of milk into his face, so that he had to dry his red beard; and he revenged himself by kicking her chair away from under her, just as she was carrying a spoonful to her mouth. When she fell on the floor, he rushed to her and lifted her up, carrying her about the room for a little before they took their seats again.

Lars involuntarily clenched his fists, but remained standing in the same position, breathing heavily. He could not hear what they said, but their faces showed how taken up they were with one another, and that she had not a thought for him, who had carried in the corn

for her. When they left the table, Knut first helped her to clear away the dishes; and then, while she wiped the table, he stood stretching himself and yawning. Then he put his arm round his wife and drew her on to his knee. To see this man's arm about her slender waist, this woman upon another man's knee, made the one outside the window long to rush in and knock Knut down; but he stayed where he was, though he had to close his eyes for a little.

When he looked in again, Knut was undressing, his pipe in his mouth. He had to get up early in the morning, and went to bed early. Lars saw him get into bed, still with his pipe in his mouth, and presently heard him call: "What's become of you, old lady?" and her answer, "I'm coming!" from the kitchen, where she was busy with something.

Lars stood and watched Kristina undress too, while her husband lay waiting. She scratched her bare, round arms, took off her stays and petticoat, and stood for a moment in her chemise and red underskirt before she seated herself upon the edge of the bed and drew off her stockings. Then Lars drew back a few steps, and then a few more, as if retreating bashfully; but at last he stood still and

remained gazing at the lighted window, until the light was extinguished.

When he finally saw the light from his own cottage window, he had not the courage to go in, after what had passed. He heard the sound of scrubbing, so Petra was still washing floors.

But Lars decided to go home and sleep at his mother's again; and, without letting his wife know what had become of him, he set off, past Bertil's house, and down over the bluffs. His footsteps rang out in the stillness of the night, and presently he began humming something, as though he felt the need of singing a melancholy song. Above the mountains in the west rose the starry sky, with here and there a dark cloud; and from the fjord he could already hear the sound of the waves splashing and singing upon the beach.

Chapter VI

After the wedding, Erik Evje had moved the offices into a small, separate building near the factories; and when it was time for him to go home to dinner, he would wonder whether Inga would come and meet him that day, and if so, whether it would be by the head forester's house, or by the smithy, or as far off as the storehouse. Then when he caught sight of her he would pretend he saw nothing until the last moment, when he would start and be quite astonished. "Nonsense!" she would exclaim. "You saw me well enough, you deceiver!" And she would put her arm through his, and talk all the way home of all the remarkable things that had happened during the few hours they had been separated.

A steady calm began to take possession of Erik. He had at last come to a full understanding of his business, and knew what he wanted and what he did not want in those mat-

ters. He had become accustomed to the thought of living in this out-of-the-way corner for the rest of his life, and yet filling a place, and feeling satisfied. At home there were two women, who only thought about making him comfortable; and in the business he had a safe feeling that everything was going steadily and surely forward. When he was alone on his forest journeys and could give himself up to reflection, his life seemed to him to be a continual journeying up a toilsome road. "Well," he thought, stopping as if to look back; "that and that had to be gone through, and now I'm here."

It sometimes happens, however, that a man who jokes and laughs has a little sore place upon his foot, which hurts at every step, although he thinks about other things and walks as if nothing were the matter. Erik Evje also had a little sore place. It was a secret fear that, in spite of everything, there was something wrong up at Newland. It was a fear that he would not even confess to himself; but when the conversation turned upon the Newland people, his voice would acquire a strange warmth, as if he were washing himself clean from an accusation, or were defending a condemned man whom he hoped to save.

When it had rained for a day, and people said it looked as if it would go on, he would sometimes become quite irritable.

"Rubbish!" he would say. "How can anyone know anything about to-morrow's weather?" He feared this autumn rain, when the river grew and became dangerous. It was almost as if the laws of nature were already coming forward and ranging themselves upon Rein's side. Then, when the sun shone again, he would be in the brightest of spirits; but the rain would come on again, and during the night he would lie awake, listening to the growing noise of the waterfall, which became more and more ominous to him.

They were sitting one evening after supper —the young couple—watching the light from the stove, while the storm could be heard beating against the windows outside in the autumn evening.

Inga had been telling him with tears about an encounter with her mother-in-law. She had long suffered in silence, but to-day it had been a little too bad of Fru Evje to come and say within hearing of the servants that the Evje kitchen had never been so dirty as it was now.

Inga raised her dark head and looked at him

anxiously. If he sprang up and wanted to go at once and reprove his mother, she would ask him not to. To have him on her side was all that mattered.

But Erik was thinking that that night, on land or at sea, far more momentous things might happen, so it was easy for him to treat this matter lightly.

"I'm sure, dear," he said stroking her hair, "that mother didn't mean anything by it."

"No, of course not! She's always finding fault with me, but she doesn't mean anything by it! And you can't even imagine that it hurts me?"

"Yes, I do, but we must show a little forbearance with old people. We young people have other interests than a stain on the brass——"

"Oh, as to interests," she interrupted. "We women have only trivalities to attend to all day long."

He bent forward to knock the ash out of his pipe, and his hand turned blood red in the light from the draught-hole in the stove-door.

"Now I'll tell you something, Inga," said he, stretching his slim figure in the arm-chair. "You ought to have something to occupy you outside yourself and your own family. Have

you thought how much better off we are than, for instance, the Newland people? They've got their house and a little land, but what about their intellectual horizon? What do we do, who in this respect, too, have something to give away? You could help me in this, Inga."

Inga's eyes still watched the flickering light from the stove, but at last she turned to him with a conciliating smile.

"I help you? You shouldn't make fun of me Erik."

But Erik grew quite eager. She, who had more patience than he had, could, for instance, bring these people together every Sunday, and read to them, or give them instruction in something or other. It would be good for her too. And he talked until she felt quite grateful. It was as though he drew her thoughts away from the little troubles up to something larger and more beautiful.

"Perhaps I might teach the women up there a little embroidery and art weaving," she said, putting her arm about his neck. "I should think it would be of quite as much use to them as those everlasting prayer-meetings they go to."

"Yes, I should think it would."

Outside the rain poured down incessantly, and the river would be sure to rise with it all; but it was a comfort to Erik to be sitting there occupied with ideas for the good of the Newland people, and to have his wife with him, so that he was not alone.

From that time he felt a strange necessity of always being occupied with the welfare of the Newland people. It was as if he feared that if he were not, the moral support that Newland was to him would give way and die; and he had to keep on touching it to convince himself that it was alive. He never met any of the people without stopping and asking how they were getting on; he advised them as to which newspaper they ought to take in; he lent them books; he went up on little visits of inspection to see that they kept the air in their cottages pure; he lent them horses for ploughing; and he got them free medical attendance by the doctor of the district. He was never quite at ease unless some new thing or other for their good was in view, as though it were necessary to pile layer upon layer of benefits over this fear that he was so anxious to hide.

All this time Newland was becoming more and more precious to Erik. Its spiritual value

grew and grew according to the sacrifices it cost him, the sum of memories of himself became greater and greater, and every time it caused him a new anxiety, a new joy, it was as if he carried a new treasure up there out of his own soul. His secret fear of a landslip became more and more an anxiety lest he himself had suffered, striven and longed in vain; lest this time, too, he had made a mistake and devoted himself to a phantom; lest the good he had cherished in himself and practised towards these people were quite useless; lest, indeed, the debt of conscience that he thought he had paid were also possibly self-deception, and he just as guilty, just as spiritedly homeless, just as rootless as he had been that seventeenth-of-May evening in the festive town.

It could not possibly be so, for he was far too comfortable; but the secret fear was a spur that was constantly forcing him into gloomy reveries. Sometimes when he was driving home from a party where he had been the gayest of the company, he would suddenly become silent and sad, because he realised that all human pleasure only consists in forgetting the dangers always lying in wait for one. When he was out walking with his wife, he would stand and look at a beautiful sunset,

but the next moment think: "Well, but what do we human beings signify to all this?" What does the sun care, the mountains, the sea, the quagmire, that men go about with a soul craving for beauty and eternity?" When at night, after a well-spent day, he lay thinking with pleasure of the services he had done the Newland people, the dull sound of the waterfall would suddenly begin to speak a different language altogether. "Yes, you may do so much good that Newland becomes a perfect paradise, but some day it will be my turn." Was it so? No, no, it could not be!

But this hidden fear constantly required fresh acts of kindness of him in order to be kept down; and gradually a great change took place in Erik Evje. He began to interest himself in others besides the Newland people; and it soon became known in the parish that no needy person went empty-handed from Evje Farm, and Erik himself became gentle and tolerant even towards persons whom he formerly could not endure.

It was as though he would say: "Well, though that man may be wrong now, I may be another time." People began to like his company, not only because he had so much to talk about, but because he could also be quiet

and listen, so that other people could say something.

The autumn rains left off, and then began again; then snow fell, and Erik breathed a sigh of relief. The cold weather was coming, and the danger was over for the present. But the snow was carried away by fresh rain, and the noise of the waterfall grew louder and louder through the long nights.

It was then that Erik began to work upon something in the evenings at home, and while the two women sat near with their needlework, talking in undertones so as not to disturb him, his fair head was bent over his calculations and writing, and books and papers surrounded him. He was working out a proposal for a law for the compulsory handing over of uncultivated land to labourers, so that every father of a family could have an opportunity of acquiring a house, a garden and a cow of his own.

Week after week he sat thus, and at last Inga became impatient. "Why, dear me," she said; "there's no getting a word out of you now, Erik. You're in the office all day, and now you sit without saying a syllable too."

He looked up and smiled, as if from a great distance. "Fill that for me," he said, as he

handed her his pipe and went on with his writing.

They were sitting thus one evening, when Fru Evje, looking out of the window, called to them to come and look. Inga went, but Erik sat motionless. The two women saw out upon the fjord a long row of yellow, rocking lights, moving inwards. They counted fifty of them. It was like a gigantic fiery serpent, stretching out over the fjord, as far as they could see. "It's a fishing company," said Fru Evje. "I suppose the herring are farther up the fjord."

"Is it?" said Erik without moving.

The two women seated themselves again. Inga's thoughts, of late, had been occupied with a secret matter that no one knew of but her husband; but while she sat there wondering whether it would be a boy or a girl, and have fair or dark hair she felt that his thoughts were never occupied with her for a moment, but far, far away in other things. And when at last she rose to go to bed, he always said that he would follow her immediately; but she would often fall asleep, and it would be very late when she was awakened by his coming.

Erik sat far on into the night, calculating and writing. He found it hard to tear himself

away from this work, for he had an undefined feeling that by it he was moving his workmen's holdings over on to firmer ground. He had embarked so far upon this matter, which he feared might be fateful, that he felt that he must have more and more people associated with it in order to feel easy in his mind. Newland must become a national matter, and the more beautiful it became, the richer it would feel for his own heart. There would be thousands of little cottages in which happy families lived, and he would sit there, and, as it were, nod to them all, because he knew them. There was Peter and Olina and Bertil and Lars over and over again thousands of times, and they were all like an embodiment of something beautiful in himself, created out of his longing for things beyond the everyday life, beyond death itself. The smoke would rise from these cottages when he lay in his grave; there would be smiles behind those window-panes when every one had forgotten him; the flowers would bloom in those gardens through endless ages; and the whole of it was created by him; it was as if his own soul looked up in each smile, each loving word, each flower that opened in the many gardens. That was one way of being everlasting; it was a resurrection

to life, over and over again. In Newland he saved his soul from stagnating, and now he was saving it from death. It was a religious joy that made his periods glow; and the hours sped.

"Erik, aren't you coming to bed at all tonight?"

"Yes, I'm coming now."

But even when he was in bed, he was too wide-awake to sleep and, as he lay, the dream seemed slowly to vanish, and his days become grey and bare again. Outside in the night he could hear the rain again, the waves sighing and sobbing upon the beach, and the noise of the waterfall going on and on in its old, cold language.

"Yes, you may build up and build up gigantic dreams but it all depends upon me in the end. Your mind may be enlarged and make not only the present time, but all ages, its own, as it did this evening, when you hovered above the whole agrarian development from the time of Tiberius Gracchus, down through the centuries to yourself. In the future the whole world may be transformed into a garden, and all men may dance for joy; but beyond that am I. There I sing the concluding hymn over you all. When this earth is a frozen, peri-

natetic churchyard, moving insanely about in empty space, where then is your soul?"

Erik lay listening to the ceaseless noise that sounded like Nature's derisive laughter at everything that man did, like a song from lifeless lips, and a hissing from the barren, infinite nothing in which all things end. At last he turned over.

"Are you asleep, Inga?"

"No."

"May I come into your bed for a little?"

"Yes," she whispered, making room for him.

He crept close to her, and in the darkness his lips sought hers. It was true she had been lying thinking about her little baby, and he about something quite different; but nevertheless their lips met in a long kiss, as though it were their souls that had sought refuge with each other in the darkness.

"Why can't you sleep, Erik?"

"I don't know. Sometimes I lie and think how meaningless it is that beyond everything there shouldn't be a heart that took pity upon us all."

She laid her cheek to his, and presently said: "I've become so sure there is, since our little

baby received life. It seems utterly impossible that it could ever be quite extinguished again."

He lay quiet for a little, and then answered her with a new kiss; and at last, with their arms round one another, they fell asleep. And while they slept, the waves and the water-fall went on with their song all through the night.

Chapter VII

The winter passed, and spring came and then summer, and the life at Evje went on as usual. This year Erik had a fresh reason to be pleased, for he had received prizes for two young horses that had been bred since he came home; and this presented a fresh opening for his activity.

One day a young man, who was pursuing scientific studies in the Evje woods, came home to the farm, and said: "Fancy! All the ant-hills about Newland have become empty during the last few days, and there is a great emigration westward. Wherever you look, they are swarming in the same direction, away from the old country. I should very much like to know the reason."

No one took much notice of this, but the same day, as the doctor of the district was driving up the hill below Newland, he saw his black Finn dog appear up on the bluffs, and the wise animal whined and howled, as much

as to say: "Come here, come here!" "Yes, I should think so!" said the doctor to himself, smiling, for he was acquainted with his dog's little devices; but the next instant his horse pricked up his ears, rolled his eyes, and, altering his step, suddenly set off at a wild gallop. The mud splashed up from the road, and the doctor held on to the reins with all his might, vainly calling "Prr!" It was the first time the steady old horse had ever taken fright. But it was not until they were close to Evje Farm that the horse was stopped by a workman, and it was still trembling and snorting and rolling its eyes backwards. The dog had stayed behind upon the bluffs, and they could hear it all the time howling dismally. A boy was sent back to see if anything was the matter; but the only thing he discovered was a flock of crows, hovering like a cloud over Newland, and making a terrible noise. Up on the little farms the people were in the cornfields reaping in the sunlight, and the smoke from the chimneys was rising straight up into the clear, warm, autumn day. So no more was said about this, although the dog's howling could be heard all the evening, always from the same quarter.

Bertil Sveen rose early the next morning, as

he was going to bring home a load of firewood before he went to the sawmill. Ingeborg lay without speaking, while she heard him groping about after the porridge and milk. She was at last going to have a child too; but she had gradually come to feel certain that it would be stillborn, and that her mother, who lay in her grave, was in some way or other to blame. It was her punishment for taking Bertil, and it was of no use trying to escape from it. But whenever she let Bertil suspect her fear, he made light of it and called it nonsense, just as if he could know so much better than she did. But she found it hard to forgive him for taking it in that way.

When he went out, he said good-bye, but she pretended to be asleep, and did not answer.

Suddenly, however, she heard his step returning, the door burst open, and he rushed wildly into the room. "Ingeborg!" he cried, "make haste and get up! Oh, God help us!"

"What is it?" she asked, but did not move.

"The cowshed!" he stammered, taking hold of her to make her get up. "The cowshed's gone, Ingeborg!"

This was senseless. The cowshed gone? Was he out of his mind? She sat up in bed and took hold of him. "Bertil, are you talk-

ing in your sleep? The cowshed, did you say?"

"Oh, come, come, Ingeborg! Perhaps we can escape still."

He took her up, as if to carry her out, when suddenly a dish fell from the table on to the floor, and the cottage rocked like a ship in a storm. "Bertil! Bertil!" shrieked Ingeborg, at last clinging to him. Bertil was carrying her towards the door, but at that moment there was a noise like the dragging of a heavy stone over the ground. It was the cottage moving. The stove fell down, and from the kitchen came the sound of pots and pans tumbling about; and all the time the cottage seemed to be sliding, sliding. When at last it came to a standstill, the two occupants were thrown against the wall, a window was broken, and a little stream of water burst in across the floor. The man and woman staggered about for a while, bruised, bewildered with terror, but driven by a mad desire to escape. It had become pitch-dark in the room, so that they could see nothing. They cried for help, again and again; they moved about, but kept knocking up against furniture that was beginning to float about, as the water poured ceaselessly in through the broken window. For a moment

they stood silent, holding on firmly, for they heard the wall creaking under a pressure, and they knew that if it gave way, they were lost. But suddenly Ingeborg's terror turned to rage against Bertil. "Why didn't you come sooner to save me?" she cried. "It's too late now. Oh dear, oh dear! We sha'n't be saved, you'll see!" And she began to sob in mingled rage and despair. "Oh, God help us!" she stammered, but the next instant she heard a movement from Bertil, and exclaimed: "You always were so slow. Oh, if you'd only been a little quicker! Oh, oh!" Bertil did not answer. He was trying to feel whether the door could not be opened, so that they could get out, but he groped in vain, not knowing that the cottage was half on its side, so that the door was almost over their heads. At last he gave it up and sank down on to what he found was the table, which was lying tipped up. "It's no use, Ingeborg," he said at last. "We can't get out."

"Is this the end, then, Bertil?" she said, a little more gently. "Yes, I don't see how we're to escape now." "What is it? Is it the Day of Judgment?" "No, it's the landslip." "Oh, then I suppose we're buried now. Good heavens!" Ingeborg was moving in-

cessantly from place to place, as the water began to rise about her feet.

Suddenly she understood that death was near. It might come at any moment. And what she had been thinking most about lately, the stillborn child, that had all been imagination. She still felt it living, and the day would never come when she would be able to point to the little creature with its closed eyes, and say to Bertil: "That's because I married you."

It almost felt like an imposture. Why then had she gone and gathered together all these dark thoughts, and been in dread night and day?

"The wall will soon give way," said Bertil.

"God help us! That will be the end. Where are you, Bertil; where are you?"

"Here! Here!" And they began to grope after one another, until they met, and then seized each other's hands as if afraid of being alone—when the wall gave way.

Thus they stood close together; every moment expecting the catastrophe; but the minutes passed, the wall creaked incessantly but still held, and only the water and the thick clay could be heard streaming in.

"Oh, I'm getting so wet, Bertil."

"Poor thing! Wait a little!" And he

groped his way to the overturned table, which he managed to set upon its legs, so that she could sit upon it.

"Oh, I wish it would come soon, Bertil."

"The water!" he said, seating himself beside her. And suddenly she understood what he meant. The water that was incessantly running in would soon fill the room.

"Bertil," she said in a trembling voice, "I —I should like to have seen you once more." And presently her hand passed falteringly over his face as a caress.

"I think I've got some matches," Bertil remembered suddenly, feeling in his waistcoat pocket. "If only they've not got wet."

But as he was taking one out, a number fell into the water. It was no use thinking any more about them, but the one he had in his hand he struck carefully inside his jacket where the lining must be dry. The sulphur began to emit a green smoke, and then burnt with a steady flame, that just allowed Bertil to get an idea of how everything was floating about in confusion, and to see that the water that was streaming in was thick with clay.

Ingeborg no longer cared about this. It was Bertil's face she saw for a brief moment, that face with the fringe of beard under the chin,

which had aged so in the last few years. Was it her fault perhaps?

She turned away, and began to sob again. The match burned down to his fingers, and he dropped it, and once more they sat in darkness.

"We must make the best of it, Ingeborg," he said, trying to comfort her. "Couldn't you pray to God a little for us both?"

"I haven't been as I ought to have been to you, Bertil," she sobbed inconsolably.

"Oh, don't talk like that!"

Their hands met again, and they sat on, each moment expecting death. They were so prepared for it now, that every second was felt as something precious that must not be wasted.

"Poor Bertil," she said, stroking his face. "You've worked so hard. And you won't even see your child either."

"No; it wasn't the Almighty's will, I suppose."

"You won't be angry with me, Bertil, will you?"

"No, no. How can you talk like that, Ingeborg!"

And the water continued to rise, so that they had to draw their legs up on the table; but perhaps they still had a few moments to talk in.

They talked a little more, each word like a caress, perhaps the last.

Suddenly Ingeborg happened to think of all the times she had shown him a cross and unkind face—perhaps every single day since they had been together. If she could make up for it, or only once smile at him, as she now felt she ought always to have done.

"Bertil, haven't you got another match?"

"No, I don't think so. Yes, wait! Yes, there is actually one more."

"Can't you try to light it?"

Once more he carefully drew the little match out of his waistcoat pocket. They both felt now that in a moment they would see one another for the last, the very last time. He carefully felt his jacket lining, to see whether it were dry, and struck the match; the sulphur smoked again, and soon blazed up and cast its light on them both.

"Bertil!" she said, with a smile on her tear-stained face.

And he saw his Ingeborg, to whom he had been engaged for so many years, with a brighter, more loving smile on her face than he had ever seen in his life.

"Thank you, Bertil, for having been so good to me."

"Ingeborg!" he cried; and the strong man was suddenly shaken with a strange sobbing. At last it was the real Ingeborg from the other side of the fjord who was sitting here.

The match went out, their hands met once more, and the next moment she put her worn arms about his neck.

"Oh, Bertil, Bertil! I—I have loved you so!"

. . . . .

The landslip that night acted in various ways. One household disappeared without a sound in a minute, while another was warned by the shaking of the buildings.

In his tiny bedroom in Lars's house, the poor cripple lay writhing with rheumatism, which was particularly bad that night. But he did not complain, he did not even make faces. Since his parents died, and he had been knocked down to the lowest bidder, one after another, he had grown accustomed to being unhappy by himself, for, anyhow, there was no one to comfort him, no matter how much he might complain. Since he had come here, he considered his lot a very unfortunate one, for here they used him as a nurse, and it was not only that it was an exertion to him to rush here and there on crutches after those chil-

dren, but it was especially bad to have to waste hours in rocking the cradle, he who was so neat-fingered and could do far more difficult things.

"Oh!" he said suddenly, passing his hand down his thigh, where the pain was pricking and darting as if red-hot nails were being hammered in. "Oh! That's enough surely. Oh!" He writhed and looked towards the window where the dawn was already showing; and, in spite of the pain, the usual dreams began to come. He hoped he should soon have made enough hooks to buy an arithmetic; for he hoped by studying by himself that he might perhaps manage to get into an office. That would be something better than rocking a cradle. And yesterday old Fru Evje herself had come with a heap of broken crockery that he was to rivet. He would get something for that too, and, besides, her visit was the greatest honour that had ever happened to him. He had carefully put the crockery against the wall over there by the window—if only the children did not get hold of it.

He heard Petra get up, but no man's voice, so he concluded that Lars had not been at home last night. Then he sat up in bed, and his thoughts began to busy themselves with the

new day. What had he to dread or be glad about? He dreaded having to rock the cradle, and was sorry that Lars had not come home with brass wire for the crockery, which he was to have bought for him yesterday; and he was glad to think that a woman down in the village, who owed him twenty öre for hooks, would probably come and pay him to-day. What else? There was nothing more for him in this new day.

Suddenly the cottage was shaken, and he heard Petra run across the floor. The next moment the crockery tumbled down from the wall with a crash. He darted forward as he might have done to save a child that was going to fall into a well. The large dish was in four pieces, the jug in two, the coffee-pot was cracked right across, and the plates were in several little pieces. Oh dear, oh dear! He began to creep about on his knees and pick up the pieces. Then he sat down on the floor, and tried to fit the pieces together, and, yes, with care most of them might still be mended, although there would now be ten times as much work. Suddenly the table was overturned, the windows rattled, and there came a cry from the next room; but the cripple was quite taken up with a fresh destruction of his

crockery. The big dish was broken into still more pieces, and with it his ambition and hopes for a long time to come were destroyed. Once more he began to crawl about to gather up the pieces. He heard Petra shriek once more, this time outside, and the babies screamed. Then he heard some one laugh. Really, was this anything to laugh at? Thereupon the cottage began to creak and move; but the cripple had caught sight of another fragment under the bed, and he stooped and crawled under to get it, and presently he was once more sitting upon the floor trying to fit together the fragments of the finest dish. Perhaps it might still do; perhaps there was still a possibility.

But suddenly there was a dull noise, and the cottage began to slide like a sledge; and fresh cries came from outside, but this time they seemed to come from the roof. Yes, they might call for him as much as they liked, but he was not going to leave this crockery. He was thrown against the wall, and cried for help; but no one answered him, and he was so used to that. He recovered himself, however, there could not be so very much the matter; and once more his attention was turned to the bits of china—once more, almost in tears, he began to gather up the pieces. But now

most of them were hopelessly broken; perhaps nothing could be done; and his tears suddenly began to fall. But see, that dish might be put together for kitchen use at any rate; and once more he took courage and began collecting the pieces, until another blow on the house broke in the walls, and both he and the pieces of china were buried under the inrushing debris.

Petra had understood at once what was the matter, and she knew people had been saved by getting up on to the roof. When she came out of the house, she was greeted by a terrible lowing from their cow in the cowhouse, but there was no time to think about it now. She managed to balance the ladder up against the rafter, and had carried out the children half dressed. She first began to crawl up the ladder with all three of them, but found she could not; so she left the two youngest and took little Jens, the red-haired boy she had had before her marriage, over whom she had shed most tears. She held him under her arm, and clung to each rung of the ladder with her unoccupied hand. But when she reached the ridge of the roof, she realised that if she left him up there while she fetched the other two, he would only fall off. It was a terrible choice—to stay there

with him alone, or go down and perish with them all. For a moment she saw the strip of red sky in the east rising above the mountains. In a couple of hours the sun would have risen, and suddenly she felt such a desire to live that she put her foot against the roof, and clasped the boy to her breast, while the two children below screamed and cried for their mother.

"O God!" she sobbed. "Save us! Save me! Help, help!"

"Mother, mother!" came the cry from below, and at last she could stand it no longer, and began to feel her way to the ladder again.

"Lars, Lars!" she cried, although she knew it was not possible for him to hear her. Suddenly the cottage was struck again, and the ladder fell along the rafter and described an arc in the air. She could not get down now.

"Mother, mother!" came the cry from below. For a moment the poor woman pressed the boy to her heart while she looked up into the brightening sky, her red hair blowing about her face; and then suddenly she broke into a laugh.

"Ha, ha, ha!" she screamed, beginning to swing round as if dancing. "Ha, ha, ha! Is it you, Lars, who are bringing all this upon

us? Are you so angry? What have I done to you? Ha, ha, ha!"

It was this that the cripple had heard while he was crawling about among his pieces of china.

Chapter VIII

The weather during these days of October was unusually fine and there was a daily stream of people from village and town to visit the scene of the catastrophe. The authorities, with the civil governor of the province at their head, came to draw up a report, journalists telegraphed and wrote, and photographers did good business.

People were constantly coming in to Evje Farm, because it was so near the scene of the disaster; and Fru Evje and Inga received them and tried to satisfy every one. They had to make excuse for Erik, for the disaster had affected him so deeply that he could not see anybody.

When Fru Evje had gone to rest after a busy day, she would sometimes lie with her hands folded on the sheet in front of her, thinking: "Yes; the Almighty wants to show that He still exists. What He gives us He doesn't

want us to throw away. I said so to Erik when he started upon this." And although it was not at all what she had said, she believed so now, and that the Almighty proved in the end that she was right.

It was a hard time for young Fru Evje during these days. She would sometimes feel a vague fear that she, too, had a share in the blame for the catastrophe, but it was quite thrown into the shade by all that rested upon her now. She had to keep her husband up, the daily inspection of the farm rested upon her, and every now and then she had to attend to her baby, which was already several months old. When she sat with this little round blue-eyed creature at her breast, everything outside her seemed so strangely trivial, even her husband's restless step pacing up and down the attic above her, which at other times had such a depressing effect upon her.

"Can you smile a little to-day?" she said, as the little one paused in its sucking, and turned its face to look at her. "Smile, then, little silly!" And when the baby smiled, she felt so glad that she would often laugh aloud, strange though it sounded now in the big, gloomy house.

In Rein's house, too, the disaster had cast

its shadow, and for the first few days after it had happened Fru Rein was at her wits' end; for Rein became so strangely quiet after that day. He showed no triumph over having been right; he did not scold her for her behaviour in the matter. He would not talk about it at all, and if visitors came and began to relate something new about the disaster, he got up and went quietly out. He had an unusual amount of work to do, and sat writing and drawing, eagerly and unceasingly, until far into the night. Even when he came to bed, his wife noticed that he did not sleep. His manner to her was kind, but it was a kindness that made her uncomfortable. The rooms seemed to have become strangely cold, but she had nothing to reproach him with. He let her have her way in everything; it was only that he was so busy that he could never be with her. She began to wish that he would break through this icy coat of mail, and would not have minded if he had given way to a violent outburst, for it would have cleared the air.

It was to bring this about that she took courage one evening and went up to him in his study. Rein was standing with a green shade over his eyes, drawing, and she sat down near

him, and boldly began to talk about the catastrophe.

He pushed back the shade and looked at her kindly, but then went on again with his drawing.

"And fancy!" she said. "Besides Lars Brovold, there was only one little girl saved. She was carried upon the roof of a house down to the sawmill, but she can't tell how she came to be upon the roof. She's one of the miller's children."

In a little while Rein answered: "Yes, it's very strange." As he spoke, he adjusted his ruler preparatory to ruling a line.

Fru Rein talked on as if to get nearer to the end she wanted to attain. She spoke of Evje, and how he had not been equal to going up to the landslip yet. And in a little while Rein answered, as he turned the lamp a little higher: "Yes, it's natural that he'll feel it."

Fru Rein talked on and her husband answered her pleasantly; but she got no nearer to him. She went on, however, until she could stand it no longer, but said, almost in tears: "And you were right after all, Ingvald."

He answered in a tone of apparent surprise that he should mention anything so unimportant: "Oh yes!" Then, as he ruled another

line, he added casually: "There isn't always a pleasure in being right."

"No; is there, Ingvald?" And drying her eyes she went on: "But, oh dear, a thing like this is really enough to make anyone doubt the existence of God."

Rein answered quietly, as if he were wondering whether his pencil were too hard or not: "Oh, there may very well be a God, even if you or I are mistaken about something."

She thought for a little and then said: "And I've been imagining all the time that it was the duty of every one to look as much as possible upon the bright side of things."

"If only what's bright to us isn't dark to others," said Rein, drawing again with renewed interest.

No, she got no further with him; it did not matter what she said, she might just as well go. But, as she rose to go away once more unreconciled, she burst into tears, and sank down again with her hands before her face.

"Ingvald!" she said. "Won't you help me a little."

He very nearly dropped everything to go and put his arms about her, but he restrained himself. "For when people want to make amends for even the worst of mistakes," he

said to himself, "they have recourse to the easy way of shedding tears; but that won't make dead people alive any the more." Aloud he said, looking over the lamp, with a smile: "You shake the table, my dear, so that I can't draw."

She raised her head and looked at him with eyes that grew more and more hopeless, then got up and slipped quietly out. But no sooner had the door closed than Rein dropped what he had in his hands, and sat staring into the lamp.

He made up his mind that he would not see the scene of the disaster, but the following day he received a command from the governor of the province to go up there forthwith, and report upon the cause of the landslip. Rein shrugged his shoulders, and thought this had come a little late; but he had the horse put into the carriole, and drove off.

As he approached Evje Farm, he saw distinctly what he had fancied he saw from his own windows—namely, that the water of the fjord at the mouth of the river was cut in two, as it were, by a whitish-grey band. It was the clay that kept running out from the landslip, like blood from a wound that is invisible; and an uncomfortable feeling seized

him at the thought of having to go up to the spot.

He left the horse and the boy at the bottom of the bluffs, and went up alone past the saw-mill. He was surprised to see that everything was at a standstill here, and that the fall had shrunk to a few scattered jets of muddy water; but higher up he found the cause of this, as he stood with the scene of devastation in front of him. The landslip had stopped here where the valley contracted above the fall, and had heaped itself up across the river, thus forming a little mountain, which dammed up the river and turned the valley behind it into a lake. Where Newland had once lain, there was now a grey chasm, one side of which descended in little terraces to the water. The other side was bare rock, like bone from which the flesh has been stripped. Water ran unceasingly from the chasm, like matter from a gigantic wound, flowing over the clayey slope down into the clayey lake. In the middle of the lake the gable and half the roof of a red house stood up out of the water, looking like a great animal that had got up on its fore-legs, and was vainly trying to stand upright. Trees, torn up by the roots, stuck up obliquely here and there from the surface, upon which

there was sometimes a movement, an eddy, that seemed to rise mysteriously from the bottom, a monster bubble that rose and burst. Something or other must still be going on down in the depths.

It was still the same clear, warm, autumn weather. Upon the hills round the lake, red crowns of leaves stood out here and there from among the evergreen trees, and the sky was high and blue. Rein kept meeting people who stopped to talk.

"What's that black thing on the roof of the house?" he asked an old workman, who was creeping about with a spade over his shoulder.

"It's Töger Shoemaker, God help us!" said the man.

"What? A man? And he's alive perhaps?"

He had been alive at any rate the first day or two, said the man with the spade; but since yesterday he had been sitting motionless, leaning against a stove-pipe that was sticking up through the roof. Perhaps he was not alive now.

"But, good heavens, why haven't you rescued him, then? It must have been possible to get out with a boat?"

But the man assured him that that was just

what could not be done. The water was as thick as soup, almost like porridge, and it was impossible to get to him in any other way. They had tried several times to lay down a floating bridge, but the current had always broken it up, and yesterday, at the last attempt, a man had almost lost his life. The shoemaker had cried and cried for help the first two days, but now he had left off and did not move at all.

Rein had to go on; he could not look at that house roof on the water any longer—it was like a big living being that kept on crying for help. He met others, to whom he spoke, and it appeared that the popular imagination was already at work. Some people declared that no longer ago than yesterday they had heard cries from the depths. They thought it was not impossible that some one or other of the buried persons was still alive. A light had been seen from below one night, as if a candle were being burnt. During the first two days, while a chimney still stood above the water, smoke had been seen to rise from it, as if living beings were still trying to light a fire down there.

Suddenly Rein met a man from town, with spectacles, who evidently knew him, for he stopped, raised his hat and said he was so-and-

so, a journalist, and would like to know whether it was true that Rein had long ago represented to Evje the danger of living up there. Rein looked away, and considered a moment, and then answered: "No; it must be a mistake."

He went on again, and now and then thought he met parents or other relatives of those who had perished. A few people stood and gazed down into the depths, crying and wailing.

Rein turned to go up the hill and get above the landslip, and had to keep bending down to avoid getting branches or twigs in his face. The air was full of a strange, heavy scent, that reminded him of the vapour from bad water, and also of burnt clay or sand. He climbed up, holding on to bushes and trees, for there was no longer any path, those that the cattle had trodden down having disappeared, like thin threads that the landslip had cut off. At last, when he had reached the top of the hill, he came upon something that agitated him afresh. It was a fur cap, hanging on a bough. Rein took it down, and saw that it was worn and old. One of the Newland men must have left it there when he was in the forest chopping wood. The cap had been saved but not the man.

As he came out on an open place from which

there was a wide view of the scene of destruction, he saw a man standing in front of him, leaning against a tree. Rein did not pay much attention to him, but put his field-glass to his eyes and looked down. On the other side of the lake, he could see a man pushing himself out from the shore in a wheelbarrow, farther and farther. It must be some one who was hoping to find something or other that belonged to the victims of the disaster. It looked a foolhardy proceeding.

"Do you know who that is?" asked Rein, turning to the man whom he had seen near him, and then involuntarily starting back, for it was Erik Evje.

Since their fateful meeting last spring the two men had met, it is true, but never spoken to one another. And now they were to meet here. Erik also took a step backwards, and looked as if he wanted to escape, but the other man had asked a question, and he thought it best to answer it.

"That man?" he said, looking down at the man pulling himself along in a wheelbarrow. "That's Lars Brovold, the only person who was saved. He was at home at his parents' that night. I suppose it's his wife that he's looking

for. But he's so foolhardy that we're all afraid for him."

The words were spoken in a tired, trembling voice, but they helped to divert the agitation caused by the men suddenly coming face to face with one another.

Rein looked again through his glasses, and again found something to say, although his voice shook. Erik answered; and gradually they began to talk to one another, and now and then glance at one another.

"It was fortunate that your saw and flour mills weren't carried away too," said Rein.

"Fortunate? Oh yes. Though I could almost have wished that—that the blow had fallen on me too."

Rein said nothing in answer to this, but once more looked through his glasses; but his hand trembled. Presently he heard Erik say: "For that matter, I've lost something too."

Rein looked at him questioningly. Erik was holding on to a branch above his head, as if to keep himself up. His face was so pale, so worn with want of sleep and with emotion, that Rein felt as if he were looking at a reflection of himself. For a moment they looked at one another, their lips compressed.

Erik, like one who will ward off a blow by holding up his arms before his face, repeated: "Yes, I've lost something too, you know."

Erik had been standing here for hours, and had succeeded in looking into something that lay far, far beyond this affair of the landslip, and which was really the terrible catastrophe —for him.

Rein looked at him questioningly. Erik passed his hand across his forehead and gazed down into the clay-grey lake. "There's something, Rein," he said, "that's worse to lose than property and life. That's what I——" His voice failed him, and he could get no further.

An icy laugh broke from Rein, and he drew a step or two nearer to Erik, as he said: "Oh, I thought it was those down there that you were thinking about," and pointed out to the landslip.

Erik retreated a step and covered his ears with his hands. "Rein!" he cried, "I can't bear it!"

"I daresay not!" said Rein, with the same cold laugh, which he was unable to control. "Those down there couldn't bear it either."

"Rein! What do you want me to do?"

Rein was on the point of saying: "I think

you should jump in too, Evje; for it must be a little embarrassing to be going about unharmed when your community's lying there." But this time he restrained himself, and said aloud: "Do? Well, it's a little late now. Goodbye!" And he raised his hat and went on.

He had been unable any longer to conceal his own sickness of heart, and now he went along quite dazed, with his glasses in one hand, every now and then looking out over the landslip and the clay sea, over which the gentle autumn sun sent long gleams.

What had he said to Evje? Had he got his revenge? But, good heavens, what did he want with revenge? He had better have held out his hand to the stricken man.

Finally he made his way down to the road again. "It was one thing to give a professional opinion as to the cause of the landslip," he thought, "but no one will care anything about the moral cause."

As he drove home in the carriole, his head sank lower and lower. He thought of the people under the landslip, and of Erik above it, with his loss of something more precious, and of great spiritual leaders, who use men in the same way.

"And I myself?" he thought, as the carriole skirted the fjord.

. . . . . .

The snow came in the beginning of November, the dam was broken through, and the lake began to empty itself; but it was still impossible to get out on to the boggy clay to look for the victims. Only one man was there every day, going out where no one dared to follow him. This was Lars Brovold. He had gone back to live with his parents in the fisherman's cottage by the fjord, and every morning when he set off, his old mother would beg him to desist. He went, however, without even answering; and when, in the evening she saw him come back again, she thanked God that he was still alive.

At last one day he came into the cottage before anyone expected him, and said: "I've found her!"

"God help us! have you, Lars?"

"And now I must put together a coffin," he went on, passing his hand over his hair with a weary gesture, "and then get a horse at Evje, and drive her up the valley, home to her parents."

His mother was surprised. "Up the valley?

But, dear me, Petra's parents aren't there?"

"Petra? It's Kristina, of course!"

His mother stared at him, but was silent. So it was not his wife that he had risked his life to find.

"You must help me carry her in," he said to his father, who was patching shoes. "I've got her on a sled."

His father got up and went with him, and presently the two men came in, carrying something black and frozen, a formless bundle with snow and ice round it, which they straightway placed upon the bed. The old woman thought with a sigh of the bed-clothes, but would not say anything.

A little later, Lars came in with some planed boards and tools, and began hammering, while his father tried once more to go on with his shoe-patching. The old woman spread a sheet over the large bundle on the bed.

Under the whining of the saw and the strokes of the hammer, a box began to shape itself. And while Lars stood working at this coffin, he thought of much that had happened in the old days, and of one occasion when he had met Kristina at the shop, and she had let him carry her basket for her a little way.

"How strange it all is!" he thought. But

bad though it was, still it was he who had found her and got her up, so that she could be buried in Christian earth.

Suddenly he went and drew back the sheet that covered her, but started back. The warmth of the room had melted the ice, and she lay in her wet chemise, as on the night when the landslip came while she was still in bed. She had had a blow on the temple, but her face was untouched; the scar on her cheek was there, and her flaxen hair lay loose over the pillow and her shoulders.

Suddenly he called: "Mother! Come here!" And when she came in from the kitchen, "Look!" he said. "What's that? Look there!" He pointed to the frozen eyes, which had thawed; and now from beneath the lids, tear after tear trickled down, as if, after being dead for a couple of weeks, the girl had suddenly begun to weep.

The old woman folded her hands, her husband came in, and they all three stood and gazed at the dead girl, who was shedding tears.

When the coffin was finished, Lars washed, and put on his Sunday clothes, and went to Evje to borrow a horse; and meanwhile his father and mother, at his request, washed the dead woman and put on her one of Lars's clean

shirts. When he returned with the horse, the coffin stood in the middle of the floor, and no one lay on the bed. Lars had asked for this too, for he could not bear to hear the blows of the hammer when the lid was fastened down.

As the two men carried out the coffin to put it on the sledge, the black horse turned its head to look, and its quivering nostrils dilated as it uttered a little whimpering sound.

The old woman stood at the window watching Lars as he drove off at a walking-pace, sitting astride the coffin. "Poor boy!" she said, wiping her eyes. "It's hard for him too."

Lars drove along in the pale light of the dying day past house after house, where lamps were being lighted. He turned up the valley and had the grey fjord behind him. The dark ridges of the hill stood out against the cold, deep sky, and the snow creaked and crunched beneath the sledge. Lars had spread a cloth over the coffin, and he sat beating his feet together on account of the cold. He met people both walking and driving, but the horse went to one side of his own accord. As he passed through the big Denstad Farm, a man came out of a storehouse, and held up a lantern so that the yellow light fell upon the horse

and its load. "What's that?" he asked, but Lars did not answer. He passed the houses, and entered a wood white with snow; and here the little bell on the horse's chest rang out clear and melodious, like an old ballad. Presently a red full moon peeped out above the snow-white mountain-tops, reminding him of the time when he wandered about alone up there on the pale moors as a goatherd, and had poured forth from his horn all that moved and sounded in his brain. And almost unconsciously, as he sat, he put it all together—the recollection of the prettiest voice in the church, the slender waist, a uniform, of which nothing would ever come now, and the girl in the coffin, perhaps still silently weeping—it all seemed to grow together into a long-forgotten wordless song. And at last he raised his head and sang softly, out towards the red rim of the sky in the west, a sad melody:

"Oh, doodeli doo!
Oh, doodeli doo!
Oh, doodeli, doodeli doo!"

THE END

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